

CERTAINTY AND DOUBT:

MORAL ISSUES

IN THE PLAYS

OF

PHILIP MASSINGER

by

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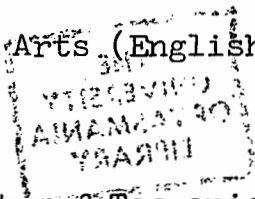
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Abstract

The theory of decadence in early seventeenth-century drama has generally been misapplied. Chapter I suggests that the moral uncertainty found in many plays is not the product of some kind of perversity but of a sea-change in the way belief, knowledge and law were perceived. The application of an ethical standard which equates a corrupt court with a corrupt private theatre imposes an ideological and inappropriate interpretation on the drama. I argue that changes in morality, the theatre and literary style are not symptoms of decay. If they are, then Shakespeare may be as culpable as Beaumont and Fletcher.

I suggest, in Chapter II, that Shakespeare's tragedies and tragicomedies, like Beaumont and Fletcher's tragicomedies, are tragic and tragicomic precisely because they are uncertain. We usually find an unresolved tension in the ending which prevents us from carrying home a moral for our use and edification. We are disturbed rather than comforted.

Massinger's method in collaboration is similar. His independent tragicomedies, as I argue in Chapter III, exploit the tension between romantic and satiric action to illustrate a complex moral world in which characters may have an uncertain and changing moral status. Typically he uses satiric characters and methods to undercut romantic assumptions and conventions. The process can sometimes lead, however, to confusions which make some of Massinger's plays morally dubious rather than ambiguous.

The questions, paradoxes and tensions in Massinger's tragedies are more acute than those to be found in his tragicomedies. He presents a shifting world in which it is difficult to judge characters accurately, and in which justice seldom seems to be done. Our sympathies are complicated by the multiple moral status of his protagonists, or their antagonists, who are never totally evil or wholly redeemable. The Renaissance plays, in Chapter IV, exploit the problems inherent in the idealistic and malicious pursuit of revenge. The Roman plays, in Chapter V, deal with more political complexities, largely the result of a simultaneous sympathy for the individual and acceptance of the identity imposed on him by the state. The tension between perceived and imposed identity, and the tragic destruction of the integrity of the individual, are most fully realised in The Roman Actor and Believe As You List.

The simultaneity of equal and opposite values in these plays is common to Massinger's work as a whole. The tension of uncertainty - whether broken, as in the tragedies, or not - seems to express exactly that "negative capability" which Massinger has been denied. Only if we read him on the most superficial level, can we consider him to be moralistic or simplistic.

Prefatory Note

It is surprising how easily critical suggestions snowball into unqualified assertions. Philip Massinger is one dramatist of the early seventeenth century who has suffered, and a renovation of his reputation seems not only timely but necessary, particularly in view of his fine tragedy, Believe As You List.

My greatest debt has been to Margaret Scott, for introducing me to this play and urging its merits, and for steering me away from too rigorous a sceptical interpretation of Massinger's plays. I would also like to thank Adrian Colman, who took over supervision of the thesis in its final stages. Cheryl Vertigan and Graeme Rayner of the Morris Miller Library, and Annette Sumner of Inter-library Loans, have always been unfailingly helpful. My debt to Kathryn Holden for transforming manuscript to type is enormous.

I would finally like to thank the Commonwealth Department of Education for a post-graduate research scholarship which has supported me over the last two years.

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other higher degree or graduate diploma in any university, and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text.

Abbreviations

- A.U.M.L.A. : Journal of the Australasian
Universities Language and
Literature Association
- PMLA : Publications of the Modern
Language Association of America
- Oxford Massinger : The Plays and Poems of Philip
Massinger. Ed. Philip Edwards
and Colin Gibson. 5 vols.
Oxford: The Clarendon Press,
1976.

CHAPTER I. DECADENCE: MORAL, THEATRICAL AND LINGUISTIC

The early seventeenth-century drama has suffered, since the nineteenth century, from the critical misconception that it is decadent. For nineteenth-century critics decadence referred to indecorous subject matter, although they had difficulty in defining a sudden moral collapse over the forty-year period from the early 1600s to the closing of the theatres. More recently, the term has been applied to literary style as well. In most cases decadence also implies the moral laxity of the private theatre audience.¹

The charge of decadence is most commonly applied to Beaumont and Fletcher,² usually in relation to their shaky moral effects. By the time we get to Philip Massinger the criticisms of them are merely re-cut to fit him. Massinger was also the focus of T.S. Eliot's influential writing on the "dissociation of sensibility" which, he argued, was apparent in

1. I am indebted to S. Gorley Putt, "The Complacency of Philip Massinger, Gent.," English, 30 (1981), 99-100, for this review of the decadence theory. On the influence of the private theatre audience see Lawrence Wallis, Fletcher, Beaumont and Company: Entertainers to the Jacobean Gentry (New York: King's Crown Press, 1947), pp. 73, 80.

2. For example, by M.C. Bradbrook, Themes and Conventions of Elizabethan Tragedy (1935; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964), Ch. 10; and T.B. Tomlinson, A Study of Elizabethan and Jacobean Tragedy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1964), Ch. 10. "Beaumont and Fletcher" refers to Beaumont, Fletcher and their collaborators in the plays of the canon, including Massinger.

the literature of the seventeenth century.³ In the face of such critical abuse it seems necessary to, as it were, negotiate a new contract for Massinger. I shall suggest later that he is not morally decadent, nor a strict and insipid moralist,⁴ but a dramatist who expresses a moral uncertainty typical of his age.

Here, I simply want to answer the charge of decadence. The arguments of the "decadent" critics are mutually reinforcing: bad audiences influence bad playwrights to write bad plays. I shall attempt, therefore, to answer their arguments in three separate but related ways. Firstly, they confuse a perverse or dubious morality with moral uncertainty. Secondly, the influence of the private theatres is more likely to have been positive than negative. And thirdly, Massinger's distinctive literary style is not evidence of decay.

The "decadent" critics tend to treat the very real problem of strange moral gymnastics in the early seventeenth-century drama by measuring perversity rather than examining the gymnastics.

Basically, they reprove the absence of moral certainty.⁵ This assumes that the function of drama is to guarantee moral security, or to organise a moral system. Beaumont and Fletcher are considered

3. T.S. Eliot, "Philip Massinger," in Elizabethan Essays (London: Faber and Faber, 1934).

4. A point of view influenced by T.A. Dunn, Philip Massinger: The Man and the Playwright (London: Nelson, for the University College of Ghana, 1957), pp. 131, 144, 149.

5. See, for example, Leslie Stephen, Hours in a Library, II, 2nd ed. (1876; rpt. London: John Murray, 1909), pp. 143, 147, 159-60; A.H. Cruickshank, Philip Massinger (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1920), p. 19; and L.C. Knights, Drama and Society in the Age of Jonson (London: Chatto and Windus, 1968), p. 295.

decadent because their moral conclusions appear to be disorganised and facile. Clearly, Beaumont and Fletcher differ from Shakespeare and not just because they are less talented. But their plays, like Shakespeare's, do respond to moral issues in an organised way. The response of Beaumont and Fletcher often seems obscure because of their tendency in some plays to stumble into moral confusion. I shall compare Shakespeare's Troilus and Cressida with their A King and No King to illustrate this. But Beaumont and Fletcher also express a more deliberate ambiguous method in The Maid's Tragedy, in which, I suggest, moral issues are galvanised and express extreme tensions. This play compares well with Measure for Measure where, typically of the Shakespearean problem play, moral issues seem to be suspended.

The following discussion rests on the assumption that a play is effective when the moral outcome answers to our dramatic experience, not necessarily our moral preferences; and, following from this, that the moral outcome need not be absolute, so long as it answers to our dramatic experience. These assumptions are important because, if we accept the moral criteria which critics of the decadence apply, we will find ourselves condemning plays like Measure for Measure as inept, incompetent, unscrupulous or morbid; or else we will have to distort the play to preserve some kind of moral integrity.

The powerfully cynical exposure of the futile opposition of patterns of conduct in Troilus and Cressida exploits precisely the dramatic potential of moral uncertainty that the critics of decadence would condemn. The consistent echoes that underlie the basic metaphors of war, factional gods, and disease qualify the potential heroics of sentiment

and action, to reduce them to the secular concerns of the central moral issue, "What's aught but as 'tis valued?" (Troilus and Cressida, II.ii.52).⁶ Shakespeare lays moral conventions bare by having Hector concede moral laws (II.ii.184, 193), Troilus succumb to

Bifold authority, where reason can revolt
Without perdition (V.ii.142-43),

and Achilles murder Hector. Further, our allegiances in the debate about honour as we pass from Trojan to Greek are broken down until we are left with simple polarised allegiances prompted by hate. This negativism answers to the dramatic undermining of all values, and to the process by which our allegiance to the characters who seek to maintain them is destroyed. That Shakespeare's morality is not meant to be absolute, that his ending is deliberately uncertain, is demonstrated in his unusual treatment of the final speech convention. Pandarus must compete with Thersites as the lowest character in our estimation, yet it is to him that Shakespeare gives the epilogue: there are no men of noble valour left. And, rather than the affirmation of Greek retribution or Trojan nobility in a historical framework, we are left with the seedy anachronistic order of "the hold-door trade" (V.x.50), in which

Some two months hence my will shall here be
made.

It should be now, but that my fear is this,
Some galled goose of Winchester would hiss.
Till then I'll sweat and seek about for eases,
And at that time bequeath you my diseases.
(V.x.51-55).

6. All my references to Shakespeare's plays are from The Complete Signet Classic Shakespeare, gen. ed. Sylvan Barnet (1963; New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1972).

The play does not provoke a nihilistic response, although the reduction to a local, ugly and mundane world is hardly more comforting. While nobility seems to have been destroyed we are not left in a total vacuum; rather, the moral problems are suspended.

In comparison, the morality of A King and No King seems simply to disintegrate in the happy ending. The final moral order, where the love of a supposed brother and sister will not be incestuous if they are not really brother and sister, is not in itself perverse. The problem is that it "short-circuits" the dramatic identifications which we are forced into by the explicit examples of dilemma that the play produces: in conflicts of obligation (A King and No King, II.i.31-36),⁷ or the conflict of passion with reason (IV.iv.67-70, 131-34). The happy ending simply insulates the various dilemmas without reconciling them: the conflicts of love, law and honour are only neutralised.

Modern criticism tends, on the whole, to defend the happy ending however:

The surprise is far from being a low trick on the dramatists' part to make the play end happily and save themselves the unpleasantness of driving Arbaces and Panthea into the fire.⁸

7. All my references to plays in the Beaumont and Fletcher canon are from The Dramatic Works in the Beaumont and Fletcher Canon, gen. ed. Fredson Bowers, I-V (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966-1982), except for The Custom of the Country and The Queen of Corinth. A King and No King and The Maid's Tragedy are in volume II of Bowers's edition.

8. Philip Edwards, "The Danger not the Death: The Art of John Fletcher," in Stratford-Upon-Avon Studies. I, Jacobean Theatre (London: Arnold, 1960), p. 165. See also Eugene M. Waith, Ideas of Greatness: Heroic

It expresses, rather, a libertine scepticism.⁹ For Michael Neill the frivolous way in which the bizarre contradictions are dismissed maintains a playful paradox.¹⁰ Yet it seems to me that Beaumont and Fletcher lose their grasp on the moral and paradoxical implications of the ending. If we accept the ending we are asked to neglect the moral issues; on the other hand, if we pursue those issues we are forced to recognise that the completeness of the ending fails to answer or even accommodate either the potential conflicts of, or the allegiances elicited by, the dilemmas.

Beaumont and Fletcher seem to lose control because the dilemmas produced by the conflicts of emotion and conventions such as modesty, fidelity, filial and brotherly affection become too complex. The symptoms can be found even in the isolated scene between Spaconia, her father Ligones, and the prince Tigranes (V.ii). The relationships of father, daughter and prince produce a dilemma of political against filial loyalty. Ligones castigates his daughter as a whore and criticises Tigranes in a tirade against filial disobedience. Hurried explanations set everything right and Ligones manages to repair his political disrespect to

Drama in England (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971), p. 151; and Philip J. Finkelpearl, "Beaumont, Fletcher, and 'Beaumont and Fletcher': Some Distinctions," English Literary Renaissance, I (1971), 158. William Appleton, however, sees the happy ending as artificial: William W. Appleton, Beaumont and Fletcher: A Critical Study (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1956), p. 43.

9. According to Michael Neill, "The Defence of Contraries: Sceptical Paradox in A King and No King," Studies in English Literature, 1500 - 1900, 21 (1981), 332.

10. Neill, p. 330.

Tigranes: "Good god preserve you, you are an excellent king" (V.ii.80), but finds no apology for his daughter. The dramatic significance of this encounter is slight, but it illustrates that Beaumont and Fletcher fail, in this play - because of the very complexity of their moral issues, the dilemmas and their consequences - to keep a firm control on the moral implications of their conflicts and resolutions.

The degree of control over moral issues seems to be a useful rule of thumb by which to assess moral uncertainty in the seventeenth-century drama. We should distinguish between the deliberately suspended moral conclusion of Troilus and Cressida and the more confused moral problems of A King and No King. To be fair to Beaumont and Fletcher, however, I would like to distinguish a more formal and deliberate moral uncertainty that suggests a structural method different from Shakespeare's rather than an incompetent one.

Measure for Measure involves us in a consistent moral dilemma; The Maid's Tragedy, on the other hand, employs rapid emotional and moral switches (a kind of chiaroscuro effect from moment to moment) which face us with temporary paradoxes. This requires elaborate theatrical scaffolding to shore up credible characters in a consistent moral perspective. Melantius and Amintor's extreme sensibility to the morality of honour (in III.i) and the rapid reversals of Evadne are emotionally exciting but difficult to believe. Melantius and Amintor function as "creatures whose responses are dictated by the situation",¹¹ patterned on the possible alternatives

11. Clifford Leech, The John Fletcher Plays (London: Chatto and Windus, 1962), pp. 118-19.

of action and resignation. Amintor's dilemma is not real but hypothetical: the emotional pressure is placed instead on the psychology of the audience.¹² The emphasis seems to be on the patterns formed by the actors rather than on the moral issues themselves. The variations on Evadne's moral status form patterns in a similar way. The switches in her moral character are only thinly motivated. The Evadne who claims

Alas, I must have one
To father children, and to beare the name
Of husband to me that my sinne may be
More honorable (II.i.315-18)

is not composite with the later Evadne who

will redeeme one minute of my age,
Or like another Niobe ... weepe
Till I am water (IV.1.255-56).

Like Amintor and Melantius, Evadne relinquishes one moral position, and its dilemmas, for another simply as the product of the exhaustion of its dramatic and moral possibilities.¹³ The parts are subordinated to a pattern of reversal rather than co-ordinated, as in Shakespeare's method, by a thematic concern.¹⁴ Shakespeare's structure is like a gradual ascent of minor peaks, accompanied by a sense of inevitability. Fletcher's involves a whole series of climaxes and tensions, with a corresponding uncertainty concerning the progress of the action.¹⁵

12. Appleton, p. 38: that is, on their conception of honour.

13. Appleton, p. 38.

14. See Marco Mincoff, Baroque Literature in England (Sofia: Imprimerie de l'Université, 1947), p. 18.

15. Marco Mincoff, "Shakespeare, Fletcher and Baroque Tragedy," Shakespeare Survey, 20 (1967), 10. See also

This structure is typically Baroque. The tendency to ornamentation, the articulation and multiplicity of detail subordinated to a pattern of heavily underlined contrast, the concentration on emotional postures, magnificence and heroism¹⁶ are characteristics which Beaumont and Fletcher's plays share with Baroque fine art. The tendency in their plays is to portray violent contrasts or tensions, which are allowed to develop to near breaking point, as in A King and No King. Because the moral dilemmas are so acute they are resolved merely by the fortunate or unfortunate event, avoiding the application of ethical principles.¹⁷ The emphasis of Baroque art, however, is not on any final impression or meaning but on the multiplicity of experiences, the delight in parallels and contrasts across the canvas or, in the case of Beaumont and Fletcher, throughout the play. The final surprise of the ending is only one more variation, not a definitive conclusion. It is this protean quality which explains the moral perspective of their dramatic structure:

the violent switches of attitude and behaviour ... are not simply resources of theatrical expediency: they reveal the dramatists' sense of a world knit up of contraries, inherently unstable and liable to sudden alteration and peripety.¹⁸

Arthur Mizener, "The High Design of A King and No King," Modern Philology, 38 (1940 - 41), 135; and Wallis, pp. 204-05, 219.

16. Mincoff, Baroque Literature, pp. 13, 16, 19; and Rolf Soellner, "Baroque Passion in Shakespeare and his Contemporaries," Shakespeare Studies, 1 (1965), 301.

17. Leech, p. 13.

18. Neill, p. 321.

Shakespeare simply responds differently, and more enigmatically, to that world.

In Measure for Measure, for example, we experience similar, although less startling, kinds of switch in the emotional and moral reversal of our attitude to Angelo. Despite his crimes, our condemnation of Angelo's moral status is mitigated by the shifting pattern of dramatic knowledge. He appears to be a man of principle in condemning Claudio; the sexual bribe seems to be his first offence; it is only later that we learn about the broken betrothal; and the satisfaction of the bribe, and the execution of Claudio, are apparent not real. The ethical issues are suspended here because our judgment depends on information released in a certain way which precludes an initial condemnation and encourages the pardon at the end.¹⁹ Our changing knowledge of Angelo's moral status influences the criteria by which we judge his judgement. In the face of this dislocation of the criteria for justice,²⁰ Shakespeare reverts to

19. See Alfred Harbage, As They Liked It: An Essay on Shakespeare and Morality (New York: Macmillan, 1947), p. 91.

20. Concepts of justice are a typical seventeenth-century problem of importance in the legal process of establishing certain truths "beyond a reasonable doubt". Shakespeare seems to be concerned with an important contemporary problem in Measure for Measure which included the reliability (probability or certainty) of evidence and witnesses, and the perspective of judge and jury in interpreting it. See Barbara J. Shapiro, Probability and Certainty in Seventeenth-Century England: A Study of the Relationships Between Natural Science, Religion, History, Law, and Literature (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), p. 11 and Ch. 5.

mercy to end his play. This is a possible rather than a necessary resolution, and one that is not very different from the endings of Beaumont and Fletcher.

Unlike the subordinative structure of The Maid's Tragedy, the patterning of Measure for Measure is cumulative: we do not judge a different character as the play progresses but progressively judge the character differently, on the basis of changing information. This pattern is produced by undercutting our confidence in the authority of criteria. In the end, are we to trust the Angelo of his last appearance any more than we trusted him at first, or in the middle? This moral uncertainty of Shakespeare's is as appropriate to this play concerning justice as the rapid series of revenges and reversals are to the chiaroscuro patterns of Beaumont and Fletcher's plays. The two kinds of structure differ in the way they stimulate uncertainty, but the dramatic motive is the same.

My argument so far has implied that moral uncertainty in the drama is not necessarily accidental. By applying the term Baroque to Beaumont and Fletcher I have implied, further, that the drama was responding to a cultural change in the way truth was perceived. The challenge to belief and proof makes the idea of alternatives possible - expressed in a range of thought from the toleration of alternatives by latitudinarians to the juxtaposition of alternatives found in Baroque art. This sea-change can be located in the appeal to new values, and the subsequent questioning of traditional beliefs, that occurred in the seventeenth century.

My assumption here is that dramatists are conversant with current intellectual issues. This might be difficult to prove. Suffice it to say that dramatists, insofar as drama is concerned with alternative actions and their consequences,²¹ are likely to be interested in changes in the perception of certainty and consequent uncertainties in contemporary thought.

George Herndl sees the changing intellectual climate as the shift from Scholastic to Humanistic thought, from a guaranteed "reasonable" to an irrational nature. The effect on the Jacobean dramatists is that they find

an increasing difficulty, and finally an impossibility, of achieving the 'reconciling' or affirmative interpretation of life which is a vital aspect of Shakespearean tragedy.²²

Fletcherian tragicomedy is, he argues, a substitute that

attempt[s] to continue the experience of tragedy in the face of the bankruptcy of the tragic vision.²³

He concludes that pessimism, mechanism and scepticism blighted the Elizabethan tragic sensibility,²⁴ but some of Shakespeare's best tragedies are concerned

21. As Harbage argues, As They Liked It, pp. 7-8.

22. George C. Herndl, The High Design: English Renaissance Tragedy and the Natural Law (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1970), p. 11.

23. Herndl, p. 230.

24. Herndl, p. 110.

precisely with the uncertainties they caused. In fact, tragedy may depend on the tension between affirmation and doubt. Herbert Weisinger, in Tragedy and the Paradox of the Fortunate Fall, suggests that

Tragedy is the product of scepticism and faith together, of faith sceptical enough to question and of scepticism faithful enough to believe.²⁵

We are impressed and pained by Othello, King Lear and by Massinger's tragedies, especially Believe As You List, partly because they do not affirm a simple moral order.

Machavelli provides a natural touchstone by which to test changing political ideas. He challenges the traditional theological justification of political authority which makes sovereignty a function of man's relation with God rather than of one man with another.²⁶ But the practical conflicts of political interest, especially the English one between prince and pope, and the increasingly complex diplomatic relations of states, had already begun to emphasise sovereignty as a function of relationships between men. The practical diplomatic pressure to adopt a modus vivendi in its turn reinforced the reality of a secular and autonomous justification of political actions.²⁷ Machiavelli simply makes this systematic. The issue here is whether a sovereign can justify his actions, and the autonomous terms make the moral basis of sovereignty

25. Herbert Weisinger, Tragedy and the Paradox of the Fortunate Fall (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1953), p. 9.

26. See Felix Raab, The English Face of Machiavelli: A Changing Interpretation, 1500 - 1700 (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965), p. 18.

27. Raab, p. 26.

less clear. This kind of uncertainty about political right probably filtered down into popular thought - it becomes, in the most obvious example, a parliamentary, polemical and finally military issue in the English Civil War at mid-century.

The English stage Machiavel tends to emphasise an initial reaction against the Machiavellian political system by men of the theatre. Closer to the 1640s, however, we find Machiavels who are no longer rabid, atheistic villians and by 1631 have a fairly sympathetic portrait of the politician in Massinger's Believe As You List.²⁸

Hobbes's mechanistic social theories are similar to Machiavelli's pragmatic political theories. Both are ex post facto rationalisations of contemporary systems of order, autonomy and power. Hobbes uses market assumptions for his model of society as a series of competitive relations between independently self-moving individuals. The motor for his social relations is power: "the means of every man to obtain his future good ... opposed to the means of every other man".²⁹ Hobbes's mechanical and materialist model rejects the hierarchical morality of the status society³⁰ for an ethical system of equality.³¹ In

28. See Roma Gill, "'Necessitie of State': Massinger's Believe As You List," English Studies, 46 (1965), 408-10.

29. C.B. Macpherson, The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), p. 40.

30. See Perez Zagorin, Rebels and Rulers, 1500 - 1660. I. Society, States, and Early Modern Revolution: Agrarian and Urban Rebellions (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp. 61-62.

31. Macpherson, p. 76.

rejecting the theological postulate of moral authority and obligation as the product of Divine Will for the rational postulate of moral authority and obligation as self-interested, Hobbes returns, however, to the same moral problems inherent in Machiavelli's model of power relationships: how is power moral? Unlike Machiavelli, Hobbes was concerned to validate his theory of self-interest in moral terms. To avoid the implication of amorality in his model he reverts to a traditional and theologically based morality of obligation:

[When] By TRANSFERRING ... [a right, a man] intendeth the benefit therof to some certain person, or persons ... then is he said to be OBLIGED, or BOUND, not to hinder those, to whom such Right is granted, or abandoned, from the benefit of it: and that he Ought, and it is his DUTY, not to make voyd that voluntary act of his own.³²

The problem for Hobbes (and the government he sought to validate) is that, having rejected the hierarchical morality of obligation, it becomes impossible to construct secure new moral systems without it. There can be no certainty that autonomous relationships of self-interest are any less repressive than hierarchical ones. It is interesting to note, by the way, that Hobbes's theoretical reversion to the traditional moral restrictions of obligation is paralleled by Cromwell's practical political return to traditional forms of monarchical authority as Lord Protector.

The reduction of moral certainties in political and social theory was primarily a philosophical problem. Most seventeenth-century theatre-goers would still subscribe to a system of authority and

32. Thomas Hobbes, Leviathan, ed. C.B. Macpherson (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), p. 191.

obligation which was divine in motivation, hierarchical in pattern and theological in justification. But even this popular conception of society was challenged by the radical shifts in perspective brought about by the religious and scientific revolution in perception.

The Reformation in England involved more than the superimposing of new institutions. To a greater or lesser degree, ordinary people became aware that their salvation was supposed to depend upon personal religious responsibility and a "rule of faith". The Reformation raised the issue "how do we know which religious faction is true?"³³ The problem, as Richard Popkin puts it, is that

Once a fundamental criterion has been challenged, how does one tell which of the alternative possibilities ought to be accepted?³⁴

The sceptical implications of the inadequacy of the perception of fact as a demonstration of truth, besides the methodological problems of the scientific empiricists,³⁵ disseminated ideas about uncertainty amongst practical thinkers on a much wider scale.³⁶ While in Europe Catholics like Montaigne pursued the religious debate in sceptic terms, the Reformation was not intellectually sceptical. The issues raised

33. Richard Popkin, The History of Scepticism from Erasmus to Descartes (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1960), p. 1.

34. Popkin, p. 3.

35. Shapiro, pp. 4-5.

36. The spread of ideas may have been helped by the high standard of education in the seventeenth century. See Shapiro, p. 13.

are (in terms of a sceptical method), but the argument always broke down on matters of faith.³⁷ Even so, many English religious controversies - concerning ceremony and church government, besides theological differences - were related to the problems of evidence and proof.³⁸

While the scientific revolution is sceptic in origin it is able to produce rational proofs. For example, the positive knowledge fundamental to mechanical determinism results from the basic question "how do we know that a Prime Mover exists?" The observable fact - motion - allows two postulates: either "objects are stationary until moved"; or "objects are in motion until stopped". Because we have no rational proof of a Prime Mover and because the second postulate is evidently true, we are able to (or have to, depending on our philosophical background) reject the Prime Mover and accept the mechanical theory of motion. The scientific reduction of evident truths to a bare minimum seems, incidentally, very similar to the sceptical reduction of certainty to Descartes' axiom "I think, therefore I am".

The shift from a God-centred philosophy, and from a Ptolemaic universe have the same effect: they invalidate the justifications for a hierarchical order of authority and obligation. The germination of new models of perception - the solar system, democracy - which are the conceptual bases of present-day Western systems of power, is already noticeable in the seventeenth century, in Leveller or latitudinarian movements for example. But for

37. See Popkin, Ch. 6.

38. Shapiro, p. 10.

some people the certainty of knowing or doing what was right, or of believing in what was true, remained impossible. And for those who were secure in their acceptance of the new or the old there was always the tension of dispute between the two. In the context of a whole cultural change in the way society and the world were perceived, the tendency of early seventeenth-century plays to remain uncertain at the end is not symptomatic of a lax or flabby morality, as critics of the decadence assume, but of a serious dramatic response to contemporary philosophical and moral problems.

Those critics, however, attack the early seventeenth-century drama from another point of view as well. They suggest that the private theatre audience had a negative effect on the drama. Leigh Hunt, after Lamb, Coleridge and Hazlitt, attributed those parts in the Beaumont and Fletcher plays that he considered morally objectionable to the demands of the private theatre audiences, especially the "profligacy of the Court of James I".³⁹ George Darley, a nineteenth-century editor of Beaumont and Fletcher, explained their original success by "the decadence of English manners since Elizabeth's sterner times".⁴⁰ The argument has a curiously long and honoured pedigree,⁴¹ although it has been

39. Quoted by Lawrence Wallis in his review of the nineteenth-century fortunes of Beaumont and Fletcher, p. 73.

40. Wallis, p. 80.

41. It includes Allardyce Nicoll, British Drama (London: George G. Harrap, 1925), p. 126; Alfred Harbage, Shakespeare's Audience (New York: Columbia University Press, 1941), p. 159; and John F. Danby, Poets on Fortune's Hill: Studies in Sidney, Shakespeare, Beaumont and Fletcher (New York: Kennikat Press, 1952), pp. 181-82.

taken to task.⁴² There are several problems. For a start, the theory relies on a completely unqualified ideological assumption. The Whig interpretation of the Civil War and the English Revolution, which explains the need for a new basis of power in democracy, makes moral assumptions about the corruption of the Stuart Court and its satellites, and preserves the Elizabethan myth of a golden age in contrast. This politically motivated interpretation is basic to the decadence theory, which lumps together Elizabeth, the public theatre and Shakespeare on the one hand; the Stuarts, the private theatre and Beaumont and Fletcher on the other. If the thesis is correct, then the continued popularity of Shakespeare's plays in court performance⁴³ and in the private theatres should indicate that there is something latently corrupt about them too! I have found no theoretical or documentary explanation of the differences between the theatrical patronage of Elizabeth and the Stuarts, nor have I found any attempt to explain the relationship of the court and the public theatre as peculiarly Elizabethan. Decadence is suggested simply by using the public and private theatres as metaphors for the political divisions of early seventeenth-century England, on the assumption that the political and religious divisions of civil war were purely social.⁴⁴

42. By John Boni, "Analogous Form: Black Comedy in Some Jacobean Plays," Western Humanities Review, 28 (1974), 206-07.

43. See Gerald Eades Bentley, The Jacobean and Caroline Stage, I (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), p. 62.

44. Another Whig interpretation. See, for example, Philip Edwards, "Society and the Theatre," in The Revels History of Drama in English, IV: 1613 - 1660,

This social theory lays no claim to decadent new stage techniques which, in fact, differ very little from public to private theatres.⁴⁵ Instead, the auditorium is seen to be of influence, and rather as it implies a select kind of auditor than specific structural characteristics. The structure of the private "house" obviously limits the size of the audience and creates an intimate relation between actor and audience.⁴⁶ A smaller audience must pay more per head to return the same kind of profit made in the larger public theatres, and is therefore likely to encourage wealthier patrons. But it does not, Glynne Wickham argues, merely consist of the rich folk culled from the old public theatres. The King's Men were constrained by regulations to maintain as much as possible the sense of a private theatre, as it was defined when the boys' companies performed. They did so by adopting the kind of repertoire and fashions of the boys.⁴⁷ The smaller auditorium, higher prices and a repertoire including romantic and satiric comedy combined to attract a special, more sophisticated kind of audience.

gen. eds. Clifford Leech and T.W. Craik (London and New York: Methuen, 1981), p. 4.

45. See Bentley, pp. 103-04, 132-33, 554; and Glynne Wickham, Early English Stages: 1300 to 1660, II: 1576 - 1660, Pt. II (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972), pp. 172-73.

46. Richard Hosley, "The Playhouses," in The Revels History of Drama in English, III: 1576 - 1613, gen. eds. Clifford Leech and T.W. Craik (London: Methuen, 1975), p. 229.

47. Wickham, pp. 137-38; see also Hosley, p. 123.

Given these facts, critics of the decadence argue a priori that the private theatres influenced theatrical production differently; their Cavalier audiences particularise the drama which the public theatre audience had universalised.⁴⁸ But the plays of the King's Men were, as Andrew Gurr points out, interchangeable between the Globe and Blackfriars.⁴⁹ And the transfer of plays from one to the other blurs the influence that the "decadent" critics suggest. In fact there is no reason, Gurr argues, to suppose that the taste of the two kinds of audience, public and private, were different.⁵⁰ Indeed, it is much more likely that the influence of the sophisticated private audience was of a positive and innovative kind. Shakespeare, for one, dismisses the groundlings of the public theatre

who for the most part are capable of nothing
but inexplicable dumb shows and noise (Hamlet,
III.ii.11-12).

The spectacle of his later plays, especially Cymbeline, The Winter's Tale and The Tempest, often seems suited to the private theatre.⁵¹ The elaboration of stage production in the private theatres opened up a spectacular visual medium which was

48. Harbage, Shakespeare's Audience, p. 162.

49. Andrew Gurr, "The Elizabethan Stage and Acting," in The Age of Shakespeare, ed. Boris Ford (1955; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982), p. 254. See also Bentley, pp. 196-99.

50. Gurr, p. 254.

51. As M.C. Bradbrook suggests, Elizabethan Stage Conditions: A Study of their Place in the Interpretation of Shakespeare's Plays (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), p. 29.

lacking on the public stage. Stephen Orgel points out that, while it has been assumed that spectacular effects would distort the plays as verbal constructions,

if we look at plays that were specifically written to be produced with scenes and machines, we shall find them far more elaborately rhetorical than plays for the public stage.⁵²

If decadence is to be found anywhere it must be in the perversity of moral debate or spectacle, not in moral uncertainty or spectacle itself. The intellectual and theatrical background of the drama of the early seventeenth century provides no evidence of actual decay. Rather, it helps us to understand the meaning of the shifting, glittering world of the tragedies and tragicomedies of the period.

Before I proceed to a discussion of these, however, there is a final charge of decadence to be considered. It is evident in an apparent "dissociation of sensibility" to be found in Massinger's plays:

What may be considered corrupt or decadent in the morals of Massinger is not an alteration or diminution in morals; it is simply the disappearance of all the personal and real emotions which this morality supported and into which it introduced a kind of order It consists in an internal incoherence of feelings ...

Massinger ends the period "when the intellect was at the tips of the senses".⁵³ Clearly, Massinger's

52. Stephen Orgel, The Illusion of Power: Political Theatre in the English Renaissance (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), pp. 16-17.

53. T.S. Eliot, "Philip Massinger," pp. 165-66, and 160. Emphasis added.

literary style is not nervous and excitable like Shakespeare's. He tends to construct his speech patterns rhetorically and according to "verbal formulae".⁵⁴ Both T.S. Eliot and Cyrus Hoy are critical of the mechanical structure of Massinger's rhetorical patterns and the diminution of an emotional register which this involves. Indeed, Massinger's verse is often emotionally unsatisfying, but this cannot be considered decadent. Eliot's theory is not primarily moral: he accuses Massinger of decadence because "his feeling for language had outstripped his feeling for things".⁵⁵ Now we have admitted that the emotional impact of Massinger's imagery is weak, but in his theory on the dissociation of sensibility "feeling" for Eliot is sensation, not emotion.⁵⁶ He confuses sensation and emotion here, and because Massinger's emotions are weak, Eliot seems to have proved his case. In fact, Massinger's language does provoke sensations and, while these are not "fused" as Shakespeare's are,⁵⁷ the image and the concept are in tension rather than dissociated.⁵⁸ Further, the tension between thought and expression is part of a larger organisation in which the relation between perception and reality is unclear. Often the rhetorical structure of Massinger's images

54. See Cyrus Hoy, "Verbal Formulae in the Plays of Philip Massinger," Studies in Philology, 56 (1959), 600-02.

55. Eliot, p. 159.

56. F.W. Bateson, "Contributions to a Dictionary of Critical Terms, II: Dissociation of Sensibility," Essays in Criticism, 1 (1951), 304.

57. Eliot, p. 159.

58. See Bateson, p. 310, on Eliot's misleading use of "dissociation".

emphasises the distance between appearance and reality, questioning the conventions by which Massinger's characters speak and act. The difference between Massinger's and Shakespeare's language is one of style rather than quality. The same can be said for Beaumont and Fletcher's morality and the influence of the private theatre audience.

The strategy of my defence of Massinger and the drama of the early seventeenth century has been to try to show that the apparent weaknesses suggested by the "decadent" critics are, in fact, strengths. In Chapter II I shall similarly try to show that the moral uncertainty typical of tragicomedy is a formal strength, not a weakness.

CHAPTER II. CHARACTERISTIC CONCERNS OF TRAGEDY AND TRAGICOMEDY

Whatever catharsis is meant to be, and whatever the emotions it is meant to affect are, part of the tragic experience is disturbing. Whether or not great tragedy goes beyond this, the process of disturbing is common to tragedies of the Elizabethan and Jacobean period. The best tragedies tend, perhaps, to disturb us and go on to transcend our doubts. Macbeth and Faustus are put away and we are left with a morally secure world. Othello and Lear suffer but achieve some kind of greatness beyond our doubts about justice in a tragic world. The lesser tragic dramatists may leave us in just such a doubtful world, but this is, I suggest, one of the functions of tragedy.

In tragicomedy, as in comedy, things are not as bad. Comic order is imposed (or perhaps superimposed) to put things right. We are not dealing with man's place in the universe but with his place in society, and for that there are rules and conventions. Our complacency remains undisturbed or is less disturbed. Fletcher's tragicomedies establish hypotheses, usually of a moral kind, and hypothetical situations in which his premises are tested. Many of his ideals are no longer attractive, but the moral problems that we encounter in reading the plays of the Beaumont and Fletcher canon today are not simply the result of a cultural distance. Tragicomedy, I suggest, questions things on a smaller scale and allows the resolution of issues in a smaller, romantic universe. So, to say that these plays are merely "ephemera that appealed to the

audiences of courtiers who flocked to Blackfriars",¹ seems too simple. It is not enough to assume that this drama, morally unfixed as it may sometimes be, is therefore bad and symptomatic of a decaying culture.

There is much in tragic theory that fails to explain why a play is tragic. The problem of the moral complexion of hamartia comes first to mind. The tragedies themselves often seem unmanageable in terms of theory or the study of antecedents. It seems safer, in the case of Jacobean tragedy, to glance briefly at the characteristics of a few recognisable tragedies, and I have chosen Othello and King Lear for this purpose.

As romances may be characterised as heroic and simple, much of what we consider to be tragic is ironic and involves a complex intellectual and emotional response. Northrop Frye suggests that

Irony isolates from the tragic situation the sense of arbitrariness, of the victim's having been unlucky....²

Curiously, our response to the tragic situation seems to involve both a reaction against and an acquiescence with this arbitrariness. Frye notes:

Tragedy is a paradoxical combination of a fearful sense of rightness (the hero must fall) and a pitying sense of wrongness (it is too bad that he falls).³

1. Allardyce Nicoll, British Drama (London: George G. Harrap, 1925), p. 93.

2. Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), p. 41.

3. Frye, p. 214.

Others have described this simultaneous guilt and guiltlessness, justice and persecution from the point of view of writing tragedy.⁴ But there seems to be an equal tension, a doubleness in the response. The tragedy seems to lie in the ironic sense that a successful outcome is such a near thing. This is unlike a dilemma because our response is acutely emotional as well as intellectual. Shakespeare uses an ironic structure to emphasise this, in which the play progresses on the basis of the ironic outcome of misperception. As I am interested only to illustrate the kinds of doubleness implied or described by critics of Othello and King Lear, I shall restrict my discussion to the ironies and ironic methods they usually focus on.

Othello has generated substantial critical interest in the flexibility of its language, especially in the ironic use of language to distort rather than to clarify, and in Iago's exploitation of language to produce the crisis itself. Gayle Greene's interpretation is that

The play presents a world of words, a world where realities - qualities, events - are so subject to verbal manipulation that they seem actually to exist or not exist as they are named It is precisely this eloquence and the assumptions that underlie it - the unquestioning reliance on a right relation of words to reality - that are part of Othello's tragedy, leaving him vulnerable to deception from within and duplicity from without.⁵

4. For example, Weisinger, Ch. 7; Richard B. Sewall, "The Tragic Form," Essays in Criticism, 4 (1954), 352-54.

5. Gayle Greene, "'But Words are Words': Shakespeare's Sense of Language in Othello," Etudes Anglaises, 34 (1981), 270-71.

This vulnerability is, moreover, shared by all the characters in the play. Iago's stories are credible because he designs them to suit his dupes.⁶ Even his own suspicions that Cassio and Othello have cuckolded him develop a real significance.⁷ And in his portraits of Desdemona (I.iii) and Cassio (II.i) Iago

spin[s] realities which are coherent within their own terms and assumptions, 'apt and of great credit' (II.ii.296); ... [although] they are actually self-referential systems which cast no light outside themselves to their supposed objects.⁸

Roderigo, in fact, demonstrates how easily one may accept a point of view simply because it is coherent, in anticipation of the more significant distortion of Desdemona's appearance in which Othello believes. Iago uses language to displace Othello's values, as signalled in his eventual conversion to the animalistic imagery characteristic of Iago at the beginning.⁹

6. As Barbara Heliodora C. De Mendonca points out in "Othello: A Tragedy Built on a Comic Structure," Shakespeare Survey 21 (1968); rpt. in Aspects of Othello: Articles Reprinted from Shakespeare Survey, ed. Kenneth Muir and Philip Edwards (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), p. 95.

7. As Estelle W. Taylor notes in "The Ironic Equation in Shakespeare's Othello: Appearances Equal Reality," College Language Association Journal, 21 (1978), 206.

8. Greene, p. 276.

9. See Mikhail M. Morozov, The Individualization of Shakespeare's Characters through Imagery, extract rpt. in Aspects of Othello, pp. 22-24; S.L. Bethell, "Shakespeare's Imagery: The Diabolic Images in Othello," Shakespeare Survey, 5 (1952); rpt. in Aspects of Othello, p. 36. Bethell tabulates the

This pervasive distortion via language is ironic in itself - language should communicate and clarify, not distort. But it is also ironic in that Othello responds rightly in the wrong scene which Iago fashions for him, so that "Chaos is come again" (Othello, III.iii.92), things are back to front. Iago presents a defiled image of Desdemona which Othello, with apparent justice, destroys.¹⁰ But, ironically, this justice produces the real defilement (as the reduction of Othello's nobility to the obscene suggests). Shakespeare allows to language a real power - Iago destroys Desdemona not only in Othello's mind but eventually in fact as well. The apparent not only seems to be real, it becomes real.¹¹

Stephen Greenblatt suggests a further irony in his interpretation of the play. Othello's self-image, presented as story (I.iii.127-69), can be refashioned by a different narrative. Action, he argues, is fiction:

exchange of diabolic imagery between Iago and Othello as follows:

Act	I	:	Iago, 8;	Othello, 0.
"	II	:	" 6;	" 1.
"	III	:	" 3;	" 9.
"	IV	:	" 1;	" 10.
"	V	:	" 0;	" 6.

10. Just how acceptable Othello's punishment would have been if Desdemona really had been guilty is still debatable, but infidelity was considered a serious crime.

11. See Taylor, especially pp. 203, 206.

Lodovico's bizarrely punning response to Othello's final speech - 'O bloody period!' - insists precisely upon the fact that it was a speech, that this life fashioned as a text is ended as a text.¹²

Othello is destroyed because his perception and his identity are fictional rather than real,¹³ but language plays a further trick in the multiple layers of interpretation we are able to make. Othello as a text is really destroyed because he is a fiction, but Othello as a text makes that reality into fiction again. The duality of our response to the real destruction of Desdemona and Othello by a fictional misperception is undercut by our exit from the theatre, that is, by our consciousness of the play as fiction. This undercutting preserves a crux at the end. Othello might suggest an inscrutable universe - Iago refuses to elucidate,¹⁴ we do not know whether he is archetypal or merely a moral aberration. And we do not know whether the tragedy is spiritually, morally or philosophically significant because the gods are an imprecise element

12. Stephen J. Greenblatt, "Improvisation and Power," in Literature and Society: Selected Papers from the English Institute, 1978, NS 3 (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), pp. 74, 89; rpt. in his Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

13. Albert Gerard condemns Othello because his identity is illusory and, in his terms, superficial. See his "'Egregiously an Ass': The Dark Side of the Moor. A View of Othello's Mind," Shakespeare Survey, 10 (1957); rpt. in Aspects of Othello, pp. 16-18.

14. Greene, p. 281.

and because we cannot be sure whether Othello sacrifices himself in faith or kills himself in despair.¹⁵ Despite his suffering, Othello is not the wretch whose soul will be hurled from heaven for fiends to snatch at (V.ii.270-72). The base Indian/Judean speech makes even that debatable. This is a pattern paralleled in King Lear, Antony and Cleopatra, even Macbeth. And despite the sense that he leaves a world too small for him, we are left with the questions and doubts which would force us to capitulate. The ending of Othello is not gloomy but neither is it promising. We do not carry home the moral "look out for deceptive friends" for, in Rymer's phrase, our use and edification. Rather, the play leaves us, as I suggest it should, disturbed and doubtful but not, in Bradley's terms, crushed, rebellious or desperate.¹⁶

15. The issue is complicated by the textual problem of the base Indian/Judean:

"If Othello is the base Indian who threw away a pearl richer than all his tribe, then he is still within the restricting self-justifications of loving not wisely but too well. If he is the base Judean, that is, if he sees himself as Judas, then he sees himself as one who has betrayed If this latter reading is correct, then Othello's last speech is plainly an act of despair, and not an act of knowledge that justifies his killing of Desdemona and of himself."

Thomas P. Roche, Jnr., "'Nothing Almost Sees Miracles': Tragic Knowledge in King Lear," in On King Lear, ed. Lawrence Danson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), p. 145.

16. A.C. Bradley, Shakespearean Tragedy (1904; London: Macmillan, St. Martin's Library edition, 1957), p. 18.

Where cosmological significances are imprecise in Othello they are unmanageable in King Lear. If Shakespeare pits various fictions against each other in Othello he opposes fundamental beliefs in King Lear, from the thoroughgoing religious optimism of Edgar -

Think that the clearest gods, who make them
honors
Of men's impossibilities, have preserved thee
(King Lear, IV.vi.73-74);
The gods are just, and of our pleasant vices
Make instruments to plague us (V.iii.172-73) -

to the Machiavellian cynicism of Edmund on "the excellent foppery of the world" (I.ii.121-31). The identification of the gods in Lear's world is kaleidoscopic. This is characteristic of the play as a whole and the product is an inconclusiveness evident in the tendency of the play not to end.¹⁷ Stephen Booth, in fact, describes the play in terms of an inconclusive triad, the opposition of thesis and antithesis, significantly without a resolving synthesis.¹⁸

The ironies inherent in such a suspended opposition are vast. I shall restrict myself here to a few images and puns that have attracted critical attention. The metaphorical significance of the Dover cliff scene has interested several critics.¹⁹ Janet Adelman suggests that the tension between

17. Stephen Booth, "On the Greatness of King Lear," in Twentieth Century Interpretations of King Lear: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Janet Adelman (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1978), p. 102.

18. Booth, p. 123.

19. Janet Adelman, Introduction, in Twentieth Century Interpretations, pp. 1-2; Bert O. States,

experiencing the cliff as Gloucester does (via Edgar) as real, and the reservation of judgement about what we see, that is, the uncertainty whether the cliff is meant to be real or illusory, involves uncertainty about the imaginative force of all representation. The method is repeated in the same doubleness of our response to Tom o'Bedlam. This kind of ambiguity introduces us to the uncertainties of the characters. We do not accept the description of the cliff as real, and are therefore uncertain of the value of the miracle which Edgar affirms has happened. Derek Peat sees the ambiguity in the absence of a corroborating second character. The audience is, in effect, placed in Gloucester's position, trusting the eyes and word of another.²⁰ Lawrence Danson uses the scene as the metaphorical basis for his interpretation of the play. It expresses, he argues, an exhausting state of suspension. We can be neither Edgar-like, grasping for infinity, nor Gloucester-like, descending toward nothing, but are incapable of reaching either secure extreme. And the attempt to measure man emotionally and morally by either yardstick is impossible.²¹ The product of this model is, in most cases, an ambiguous interpretation of the ending.

"Standing on the Extreme Verge in King Lear and Other High Places," The Georgia Review, 36 (1982), 417-25; Derek Peat, "'And That's True Too': 'King Lear' and the Tension of Uncertainty," Shakespeare Survey, 33 (1980), 43-53; Lawrence Danson, "King Lear and the Two Abysses," in On King Lear, pp. 125-33.

20. Peat, p. 48.

21. Danson, pp. 132-33, and p. 125.

Thomas Roche finds a similar paradigm of ambiguity in the line: "Nothing almost sees miracles / But misery" (King Lear, II.ii.168-69). Its meanings run the gamut from optimism - "almost nothing but misery sees miracles" - to cynical nihilism - "nothing almost sees miracles but really sees misery". The two extremes help define, respectively, a transcendent interpretation of Lear beyond misery, and of a Lear in misery hoping for a miracle.²² Most critics agree that the play is not nihilistic or existentialist²³ but only by a leap of faith could it be thought Christian. And that involves, for Roche, importing a providential view of history, a hierarchical view of society, and a moral view of humanity into the ending of the play.²⁴ Other critics, however, maintain the tension of uncertainty until the end, arguing that Shakespeare does not cast his vote for one view or the other.²⁵ Rosalie Colie goes so far as to identify a formal paradoxical structure in Shakespeare's use of a commonplace paradox-essay by Ortensio Lando:

22. Roche, p. 139.

23. Roche, p. 160; Maynard Mack, "The World of King Lear," in Twentieth Century Interpretations, pp. 67-68; Duncan S. Harris, "The End of Lear and a Shape for Shakespearean Tragedy," Shakespeare Studies, 9 (1976), 253.

24. Roche, p. 160.

25. Mack, pp. 68-69; Peat, p. 44; Greenblatt, Renaissance Self-Fashioning, p. 254.

That poverty is better than riches.
 It is better to be ignorant than learned.
 It is better to be blind than to have sight.
 It is better to be mad than wise.
 It is not a bad thing for a prince to lose his
 state.
 It is better to live in exile than to languish
 in one's native land.
 It is better to weep than to laugh.
 It is better to live in a cottage than in a
 great palace.
 It is neither shameful nor odious to be a
 bastard.
 It is better to be in prison than at liberty.
 A frugal life is better than a splendid and
 sumptuous one.
 It is better to have no servants than to have
 them.²⁶

Colie suggests that the same paradoxes in King Lear
 force us to affirm the duplicity of moral action.²⁷

The tendency to disturb in Othello and King Lear is a product of the ironic doubleness of the tragic vision. The delicacy of the balance, especially in the ending of Lear, between a sense of rightness and a sense of wrongness is perhaps basic to our peculiar enjoyment of tragedy. That enjoyment would, for most critics, be destroyed by the secure poetic justice of Tate's version of the play. Yet when we turn to tragicomedy we find critics making quite different requirements of drama. It is generally seen as a fault that in tragicomedy

There is no real quest for moral certainty
 only the facile reduction of arti-
 ficially contrived paradoxes, with no attempt
 to resolve moral issues.²⁸

26. Rosalie L. Colie, Paradoxia Epidemica: the Renaissance Tradition of Paradox (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), pp. 461-62.

27. Colie, p. 481.

28. Irving Ribner, Jacobean Tragedy: The Quest

Now, I am not concerned that the paradoxes of tragicomedy may be more artificial and less powerfully emotional than the disturbing uncertainties of some tragedies. Obviously, tragicomedies are different and we must recognise the conventions of the genre in order to determine whether they are "facile". But we cannot simply assume that moral uncertainty in tragicomedy is symptomatic of dramatic incompetence or moral weakness. That is, we must consider the possibility that uncertainty is a tragicomic as well as a tragic concern, and that it may be a merit rather than a fault. While I am primarily concerned to defend the tragicomedies of Massinger it will be necessary to consider the form more generally first, as Massinger exploits the methods and conventions of both his tragicomic predecessors, Fletcher and Shakespeare.

Clearly, criticism of the kind of tragicomedy which Fletcher wrote and influenced should account for the particular conventions of the form. General studies of tragicomedy (by Eugene Waith, Marvin Herrick and Frank Ristine²⁹) argue that tragicomedies in the European vernaculars are of an informal, indigenous, "mixed" impulse in the drame libre, relying heavily on medieval romances and more recent novella. Superimposed on, or interposed within,

for Moral Order (London: Methuen, 1962), p. 16.

29. Eugene M. Waith, The Pattern of Tragicomedy in Beaumont and Fletcher (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1952); Marvin T. Herrick, Tragicomedy: Its Origin and Development in Italy, France and England (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1955); Frank Humphrey Ristine, English Tragicomedy: Its Origin and History (New York: Russell and Russell, 1963).

this drame libre are classical and neo-classical characteristics of direct practical or else theoretical influence.

For Waith, Fletcher's distinctive tragicomic characteristics are verisimilar manners, remoteness from the familiar world despite this verisimilitude; an intricate and symmetrical structure; hypotheses, often of a sensational or unusual kind; an atmosphere of evil, although one in which disaster never seems inevitable; "Protean" characters; "lively touches of passion"³⁰ which are more significant than the consistency of characterisation; and a system of moral and emotional associations beyond the context of the play.³¹ Herrick sees tragicomedy as a complex growth drawing on ancient and contemporary sources. He emphasises the pastoral influence of the eclogue, which contributed the amorous complaint and the Arcadian or Sicilian scene; and the Satyr play, which provided a mixed tragic and comic treatment. It is to Roman comedy that he looks for the dramatic structure of multiple plots, reversals and the happy ending; and to romance for the sophisticated characters typical of tragicomedy.³² Ristine's premise is simply that romance provided the basic material out of which romantic tragicomedies developed.³³

Because those who practised in the tragicomic form were themselves engaged in debate on its

30. Waith, The Pattern of Tragicomedy, p. 39.

31. Waith, pp. 31-40.

32. Herrick, pp. 169-70.

33. Ristine, p. 95.

propriety, much of the contemporary "evidence" for an alleged tragicomic genealogy (by Guarini and others) begs the question of influence. Further, much of the evidence for sources, especially in the religious drama (the Christian Terence, the mystery cycles, and the tragedia sacra³⁴), does not square with the romantic Jacobean version.

What is clear from the studies of tragicomic sources, however, is the importance of the romance. It is interesting to note that the tragicomic model, as described above by Herrick, Ristine and Waith, sits comfortably with the Elizabethan narrative romances. And it may be useful to consider that, in the absence of Shakespeare's dramatic romances, criticism of the Arcadia or The Faerie Queene does pay attention to the moral and aesthetic conventions of the romance form.

Tragicomedy of the Beaumont and Fletcher kind cannot, however, be excused so lightly. The issue is complicated by Shakespeare's excursion into the tragicomic form. Shakespearean criticism seems to ignore or excuse the apparent impropriety of his mixed and improbable plots, characters and actions (and the lack of principle in writing for the private theatre!). But it does allow to Shakespeare's kind of tragicomedy a coherence, a structural completeness: most commonly, that his last plays arrive at a solution to the earlier tragic

34. See Herrick, pp. 4-6, 91; Ristine, pp. 11-12; Louise George Clubb, "The Virgin Martyr and the Tragedia Sacra," Renaissance Drama, 7 (1965), 103-26.

experience, or a relaxing of the ironies that so absorb us in the tragedies.³⁵ Implicit in this magnanimous pardon is the assumption that the "Beaumont and Fletcher" kind of tragicomedy does not reveal a structural principle. How, then, do Shakespearean and Fletcherian tragicomedies compare? We shall find that the root of the problem lies in the misappropriation of Shakespeare's tragicomic interpretation, which is admittedly marvellous, as a dramatic model by which to judge the different interpretation in the "Beaumont and Fletcher" plays. It is not simply that "all theyr Playes be neyther right Tragedies, nor right Comedies",³⁶ but that they are thought not to be "right tragicomedies" either.

In Cymbeline, The Winter's Tale and The Tempest Shakespeare exhibits the typical tragicomic characteristics described above. In each play he hypothesises conventions of behaviour in an examination of morals and moral education. He develops symmetrical patterns so that character, action and imagery bear a formal as well as a dramatic relationship to each other. Within this symmetry, and typical of Shakespeare's style in general, he anticipates the linear progression of the plot in the moral development of his characters and their motivation for acting the way they do.

These sustained hypotheses and symmetries are conventional and artificial. While Cymbeline and

35. As Una Ellis-Fermor argues in The Jacobean Drama: An Interpretation (London: Methuen, 1936), p. 26; see also Danby, pp. 106-07.

36. Sir Philip Sidney, Sidney's Apologie for Poetrie, ed. J. Churton Collins (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907), p. 54.

Othello make an interesting comparison, and The Winter's Tale and Othello, or The Tempest and King Lear are complementary, the later plays are quite different from the earlier. Shakespeare is not concerned in these, as he was in the tragedies, with inevitable decay but with the potential for reform. His tragedies break down moral interstices, the tragicomedies pursue consequent moral chaos. Because of this, natural evil is a premise in Shakespeare's tragicomedies, while it was an actual process under examination in his tragedies. We are asked to consider the hypothesis, for example, that in entertaining a conventional jealousy, as Posthumus does in Cymbeline, or as Leontes does in The Winter's Tale, one's self-perception and one's world become chaotic. For Leontes, if adultery is nothing,

Why, then the world and all that's in't is
nothing,
The covering sky is nothing, Bohemia nothing,
My wife is nothing, nor nothing have these
nothings,
If this be nothing (The Winter's Tale,
I.ii.293-96)

and

if I mistake
In those foundations which I build upon,
The center is not big enough to bear
A schoolboy's top (ii.i.100-03).

Posthumus condemns all women, and his wholesale rejection introduces an ambivalent status for goodness:

Wherein I am false I am honest;
not true, to be true (Pisanio, in Cymbeline,
(IV.iii.42).

Shakespeare also considers the hypothesis, using another romantic convention, that evil of a tragic potential may be averted in a shift from the political to the pastoral world. While Shakespeare's earlier pastoral retreats are similar, the "green world"³⁷ functions in the tragicomedies specifically to introduce new values into the moral vacuum of the court. In Cymbeline, Belarius, Guiderius and Arviragus (perhaps "Fidele" as well) replace the corrupted political family with a new one based on affection. Perdita and Florizel reintroduce the values rejected by Leontes at the beginning of The Winter's Tale and make way for his spectacular reunion with Hermione.

In both cases, the hypotheses that the pastoral environment and those educated in it can resolve moral problems are positive. The fortuitous catastrophe, and the dénouement of reconciliation and marriage result from the pastoral influence. And, to some extent, the gods are vindicated. Hermione, with faith in the oracle, lives to bless her daughter:

You gods look down,
And from your sacred vials pour your graces
Upon my daughter's head (The Winter's Tale,
V.iii.121-23).

And Jupiter in Cymbeline affirms

Whom best I love I cross; to make my gift,
The more delayed, delighted. Be content
(Cymbeline, V.iv.71-72).

Certainly, there is no need for suffering any more, but this seems to be as much the mechanical result

37. See Frye, pp. 182-84.

of the preservation of the protagonists as of divine ordinance. While there is no questioning of divine order as in the tragedies, the gods are superimposed on a fundamentally domestic order.

Divinity in Cymbeline is complicated by the conventions of kingship which Shakespeare's History plays involve. It is basically serious, the gods do seem to exercise moral control, and the political implications make a final order necessary. The hypothesis of a pastoral reconciliation, and of a place for the gods in the new moral order is, however, qualified in The Winter's Tale. The deaths of Mamillius and Camillo, and the success of Autolycus in his court career, so influential that he may "swear to the prince thou art as honest a true fellow as any is in Bohemia" (The Winter's Tale, V.ii.160-61), remind us that the new green world is never far away from the "withered bough" (V.iii.133) of the ending.

Shakespeare's hypothesis in The Tempest receives even more subversive treatment. There are no gods but Prospero, and it is his own moral observation, not some divine law, that Miranda's "too light winning [would] / Make the prize light" (The Tempest, I.ii.454-55). And despite the facilities he has at hand, Sebastian, Antonio, Trinculo, Stephano and Caliban are not reformed. The pastoral environment fails to provide a firm moral order. Prospero's "ending is despair, / Unless I be relieved by prayer" (Epilogue, 15-16). While this may seem comforting, the disturbing irony of the parallel invocations - Miranda's "O brave new world / That has such people in't" (V.i.183-84) and Caliban's "O Setebos, these be brave spirits indeed" (V.i.261) - undercuts any

security by making us ask "prayer to whom?" Shakespeare questions the possibilities of moral order and in each case answers with a simple conventional model.

In the tragedies, he organises the collapsing world around his protagonists. The action and imagery is controlled by the development of his characters in the process of coming to terms with a morally hostile world. In the tragicomedies his protagonists are not the organising centre. Instead, the relationships of character, action and imagery are governed by a formal tragicomic pattern of juxtaposition. Belarius, Guiderius and Arviragus function as a pastoral unit imported into the action of battle, and their political and domestic resolution of conflict is a tableau of natural, uncorrupted virtue. Similarly, the emotions of Imogen's mistaken-identity scene are used to excite the difference between real and titled nobility:

A headless man? The garments of Posthumus?
I know the shape of's leg; this is his
hand,
His foot Mercurial, his Martial thigh,
The brawns of Hercules; but his Jovial face -
(Cymbeline, IV.ii.308-11).

The scene is primarily part of an ironic pattern - Cloten appears to be martial, Herculean; the pathos, which is the really questionable part, is secondary. Again, the relationships of the Queen and Imogen, Cloten and Posthumus, money and jewels, Italian and Roman, function as moral co-ordinates by irony and contrast, but do not by themselves further the action.

In The Winter's Tale we find the same organising principle. Florizel and Perdita function as a pastoral unit imported into the courtly world of Sicilia, similar in kind to Belarius, Guiderius and Arviragus. The superimposed motivation by which they get there (IV.iv.501-05) is mechanical. They have to be brought to Sicilia, as far as the tragicomic pattern is concerned, to balance courtly and pastoral values.

The Tempest is clearly articulated in the same way. The first two scenes immediately establish the terms of reference for the artificial environment that Prospero engineers. It seems real enough (at least, theatrically real) but is only imaginary. Prospero's power to make the image real controls the actions of the three moral groupings on the island. He is able to avoid, for instance, the assassination of Alonso. But moral order is developed more fundamentally by the reconciliation motif of Ferdinand and Miranda. This is, of course, qualified at the end: "Sweet lord, you play me false" (The Tempest, V.i.172); more fundamentally when

These our actors
 ... like the baseless fabric of this vision,
 ... shall dissolve,
 And like this insubstantial pageant faded,
 Leave not a rack behind (IV.i.148-56).

Shakespeare, in fact, draws attention to the whole artificiality of the scheme. But the reconciliation motif allows him to make a neat tableau in a manner that is particularly Baroque. There is no linear progression to the resolution of evil, but a contrasting of virtue which outshines vice. The final scene is a crowded canvas of the various states of moral

man, and Shakespeare, in a highly theatrical moment, deliberately focuses our attention on the lovers at chess. Only Trinculo and Stephano change in a fairly mechanical reaction to their torment, while Ferdinand and Miranda are simply imported into the final moral scheme, almost from outside the rest of the action.

This symmetrical structure in Shakespeare's tragicomedies is like that in the Beaumont and Fletcher plays.³⁸ But our response to Shakespeare's tragicomedies is repeatedly more complex. While he experiments in the tragicomic form, Shakespeare maintains his habitual method of dramatic development by the thorough motivation of character. Hamlet's equivocations, for instance, are consequent upon his moral and emotional condition, and they explain and restrain the action. Fletcher's *Philaster*, in the same kind of situation, has no reason to equivocate, and he simply responds to predetermined stimuli, exciting as they may be. Othello and Leontes have much more in common. While, as I have argued earlier, the focus of the examination in the plays is different, Shakespeare is still at pains, in The Winter's Tale for example, to explain and persuade us to accept Leontes' jealousy. (Compare Gomera's automatically jealous response to Oriana's indecorous praise of another gentleman in The Knight of Malta,

38. Whether Shakespeare influenced Beaumont and Fletcher or the other way about is not important to my argument. For opposite views see Ashley H. Thorndike, The Influence of Beaumont and Fletcher on Shakespeare (Worcester, Massachusetts: Wood, 1901) and David L. Frost, The School of Shakespeare: The Influence of Shakespeare on English Drama, 1600-42 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968).

(III.iii), or Philaster's jealousy.³⁹) Shakespeare designs the scene so that Leontes' emotional state is mirrored in Camillo's modest defences. The debate illustrates the escalation of his jealousy not as a simple reaction but as a series of responses underlining his increasingly radical misperception.

We find the same principle of characterisation in Cymbeline, where Iachimo contrives to gain a jealous reaction from Posthumus by a series of innuendoes. Of course, the requirements of symmetry in the tragicomic structure often preclude adequate character motivation but Shakespeare's protagonists are at least consistently sympathetic or antipathetic.

In Cymbeline Cloten and the Queen die; in The Winter's Tale Mamillius and Camillo die; in both the characters and sometimes the audience believe apparent deaths to be real; in The Tempest nearly all the characters think that their compatriots are dead. Shakespeare's potential tragedy tends to be severe and this complicates our acceptance of the happy ending. But on the whole we tend to accept the tragicomic casualties. It is really the tragic potential in the suffering of those characters with whom we most sympathise that the complexity lies.

39. The Knight of Malta can be found in The Works of Beaumont and Fletcher, ed. A.R. Waller, VII (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1906). Philaster's automatic responses have been well noted. See Henry W. Wells, Elizabethan and Jacobean Playwrights (1939; New York: Kennikat Press, 1964), pp. 122-23; Danby, p. 170; Appleton, p. 32; Finkelpearl, p. 154; Leech, p. 86.

Where there is a tension between actions and their moral justification the tendency to sympathise with a suffering character, to see him as a victim, questions the environment in which he suffers. In the case of Posthumus, the questions

Why did you suffer Iachimo, slight thing of
Italy,
To taint his nobler heart and brain with
needless jealousy? (Cymbeline, V.iv.47-48)

and

thou king of gods, why hast thou thus
adjourned
The graces to his merits due ...?
(V.iv.55-56)

cannot simply be answered by Jupiter's "Whom best I love I cross" (V.iv.71). The accusation that Posthumus' suffering is needless and undeserved questions Jupiter's morality not his power. The case of Imogen is even more acute. Nor can Hermione, and even Leontes for that matter, be seen simply as "precious winners" (The Winter's Tale, V.iii.131).

In both cases, the issue is defined in terms of the gods who "connive at us" (IV.iv.680), but the final reconciliation suspends the moral issues, leaving us with an inscrutable universe which is possibly benevolent, possibly malevolent. Shakespeare's dramatically risky but theatrically spectacular dénouements in these plays seem to underline exactly this comic reduction of moral issues. He exploits a typically tragicomic juxtaposition of moral claims, but what is important is the exhibition of moral issues, concerning jealousy, fidelity and so on, before the comic conclusion arrives.

In the following discussion I do not wish to propose that Fletcher, because his tragicomedies are similar to Shakespeare's, should not be criticised. Where Shakespeare and Fletcher are similar, Fletcher's work is often inferior.⁴⁰ Rather, I wish to point out that, while by "tragicomedy" Shakespeare and Fletcher understand the same thing, Shakespeare's structure tends to be more linear, based on the motivation of action by character, while Fletcher's is cross-referential, in terms of tragicomic symmetry, more patterned.

The Faithful Shepherdess, Philaster and The Mad Lover, all by Beaumont and Fletcher or Fletcher alone,⁴¹ exploit romantic conventions to establish hypotheses for moral conduct. In The Faithful Shepherdess the argument is clear:

sure there is a power
In that great name of virgin, that bindes
fast
All rude uncivill bloods, all appetites
That break their confines (The Faithful
Shepherdess, I.i.24.27);⁴²

therefore, says Clorin,

40. As Frost suggests in his vitriolic attack.

41. According to Cyrus Hoy, who has conducted the most exhaustive study of collaboration in the Beaumont and Fletcher plays. See "The Shares of Fletcher and his Collaborators in the Beaumont and Fletcher Canon," Studies in Bibliography, 8 (1956) - 15 (1962). Hoy does not discuss The Faithful Shepherdess or The Mad Lover, on the basis that they are not collaborations. This study follows Hoy's determination of shares throughout: A King and No King, 11 (1958), 91; The Maid's Tragedy, 11 (1958), 94; Philaster, 11 (1958), 95-96; The Custom of the Country, 9 (1957), 146-47; The Queen of Corinth, 12 (1958), 98-108; A Very Woman, 9 (1957), 154-55.

42. All my references to the plays of the Beaumont

strong chastity,
 Be thou my strongest garde, for heere
 Il'e dwell
 In opposition against Fate and Hell
 (I.i.127-29).

The hypothesis is subsequently demonstrated in the night's activity in the woods.

The hypothesis of Philaster -

sure our love
 Will be the nobler, and the better blest,
 In that the secret justice of the gods
 Is mingled with it (Philaster, I.ii.101- 04)43 -

is finally affirmed, but not in the straightforward manner of The Faithful Shepherdess. Rather, the cosmic power of love is expressed in its transcendence of the attempts and failure to consolidate a secure moral vision. The play overflows with contradictory claims to divine justice, each functioning to undermine another:

By all those gods you swore by, and as many
~~More of my owne, I will have fellowes, and~~
 such
 Fellowes in it, as shall make noble mirth
 (II.iv.152-54).

says Megra;

and Fletcher canon are from Bowers's edition, except The Custom of the Country, for which I have used The Works of Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher, Variorum Edition, gen. ed. A.H. Bullen, I (London: George Bell, 1904); The Queen of Corinth, which is only available in Waller's edition, volume VI; and A Very Woman which has been edited by Philip Edwards in the Oxford Massinger, volume IV.

43. Bowers's edition, volume I.

Why, who can but beleeeve him? He does sweare
 So earnestly, that if it were not true,
 The gods would not endure him (III.i.266-68),

from Philaster;

Sir, take you heed, how you dare the powers
 That must be just (IV.iv.45-46),

from the faithful Dion; and against this we find a "never pleased Fortune" (V.iii.34). When the knots are all untied the belief that "The Gods are just" (V.v.136) is not undercut as it is in Lear, but the same process of pitting versions of divine justice against each other still suggests uncertainty. If the gods are in control, are they a never pleased Fortune or powers that must be just? Clifford Leech argues that these ambiguities are irreconcilable,⁴⁴ but the hypothesis is vindicated in the love of Arathusa and Philaster, which is shown to be noble and blessed in the degree to which their romantic vision transcends uncertainty.

In The Mad Lover Fletcher reverses the hypothesis of The Faithful Shepherdess. The series of amorous responses presented here are fantastic and uncontrolled, even to the point of subverting the ritual function of the priest(ess) of Venus. Unlike The Faithful Shepherdess or Philaster, The Mad Lover defines its hypothesis at the end rather than the beginning, in the rejection of the series of parodies of love. The antics of princesses, generals, soldiers and fools are answered by the injunction:

44. Leech, p. 150.

Be wise . . . , love with judgement
 And look with clear eyes
 (The Mad Lover, V.iv.253-54).⁴⁵

The exuberant examination of human folly necessarily ends with a social order of a basically comic kind.

The Faithful Shepherdess provides a convenient model for the symmetrical tragicomic structure. Clorin is virtuously beloved for her fidelity and chastity by Thenot and the Satyr (whose love is, respectively, refined and natural); Perigot's love for Amoret contrasts with his disdain for Amaryllis, paralleled by her plot for revenge with the Sullen Shepherd; and Cloe, in relation to the virtuous Thenot, the simple Daphnis, the lascivious Alexis and finally the malicious Sullen Shepherd, runs the gamut of sexual approaches.⁴⁶ Fidelity and chastity, virtuous love in varying degrees, lust and malicious lust define the pattern of parallels and contrasts in the action like formal steps in a dance. Crossed paths and disguises gradually narrow the complex relationships of partners down to the virtuous, as signalled in the image pattern of herbs and water, the healing facilities for hot-blooded lust. The play traces the patterned moral responses of different kinds of lover, as in Cloe's changing sexual role in relation to Alexis and the Sullen Shepherd, and in Perigot's responses to Amoret and Amaryllis in the shape of Amoret. The eliminating process by which Cloe rejects the Sullen Shepherd and repents, or by

45. Bowers's edition, volume V.

46. See Appleton on the formal juxtapositions of the play, p. 18. Leech argues that the characters are hardly dramatic foils at all but almost allegorical figures, p. 41. See also Nancy Cotton Pearse, John Fletcher's Chastity Plays: Mirrors of Modesty (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1973), p. 136.

which Perigot rejects the false Amoret, conducts us allegorically to the reconciliation motifs of the dénouement. But structurally, just as Shakespeare imported tableaux of virtue into his dénouement, Fletcher both imports virtue and exports his vicious model, perfectly maintaining the symmetry of the play.

Philaster and The Mad Lover function in the same way,⁴⁷ although the pattern of vice and virtue is not as clearly exposed. The plays establish parallels and contrasts which form the complications of the action. Philaster must defend himself politically against the king, romantically against Pharamond, his opposite numbers; he conflicts with Arathusa and Euphrasia because their love for him is identical; Memnon and Polydor conflict as representatives of different kinds of virtue in relation to Calis. Complication tests out and eliminates vice. Philaster, in this respect, approaches virtue as a positive affirmation of the love of Philaster and Arathusa. The Mad Lover is negative, it scourges foolish claims to and the fantastic expression of love, and redirects moral energy into appropriate channels.

The Fletcherian kind of tragicomedy appears to be more symmetrical and more hypothetical than Shakespeare's.⁴⁸ The hypotheses that Fletcher establishes are certainly more conventional (usually a chaste version of nobility), and his demonstration relies more heavily on the symbolic implications of

47. As Waith notes, The Pattern of Tragicomedy, p. 18.

48. As Donald S. Lawless suggests, Philip Massinger and his Associates, Ball State Monograph, No. 10/

the symmetrical pattern. This allows his characters to be more hypothetical, and it is because his symmetrical arrangements do not rely on sympathetic characters like Shakespeare's⁴⁹ that his debates do not really engage us.

Eugene Waith, in his discussion of Fletcher's characterisation in the tragicomedies, notes of The Faithful Shepherdess:

The characters are (or, in some cases, imagine themselves to be) extreme moral opposites, and the disguising of vice as virtue or the appearance of virtue as vice merely heightens the implicit contrasts in these situations by the irony of the juxtaposition. The basis of all the most dramatic scenes, whether the characters appear in their own forms or disguised, is an apparent antithesis between such abstractions as lust and chastity, fidelity and infidelity.⁵⁰

More generally, he argues that Fletcher's main characters, where the cast is small, exhibit several traits besides their chief ethical characteristics:

The result is not well-rounded characters, but somewhat incongruously many-sided ones.⁵¹

Publications in English, No. 6 (Indiana: Ball State University, 1967), p. 20.

49. Appleton, pp. 18-19.

50. Eugene M. Waith, "Characterization in John Fletcher's Tragicomedies," Review of English Studies, 19 (1943), 143.

51. Waith, "Characterization," 154.

Waith's argument follows the concept of multi-faceted characters suggested by Una Ellis-Fermor. In Beaumont and Fletcher's plays, she argues, a character functions

not [as] a homogeneous and continuous human being, but [as] a series of imperfectly associated groups of responses to the carefully prepared situations ..., even Philaster defers and plays into the hands of his opponent in a way which reveals that the guiding principle of the play is not the revelation of his character in event, but the event itself.⁵²

Waith points out that this modifies our sympathetic participation in the potential tragedy for the characters:

The exaggerated horror of the lovers' plight and the exaggerated attitudes of the lovers suggest that each situation is hypothetical - as if the author had said 'Let us, for the sake of the argument, pose this problem in the most extreme form possible'.⁵³

The tendency to abstraction and hypothesis is consequent on the symmetrical tragicomic structure. Naturally, inconsistencies in the way characters speak and act can be attributed to the underlying abstraction and the general hypothesis. But Fletcher's characters are problematic not only because of their abstraction, exaggeration and inconsistency, but because his structure which is built out of extreme hypotheses and symmetries requires an intricate scaffolding by minor actors

52. Ellis-Fermor, p. 208. The point is also made by Arthur C. Kirsch, Jacobean Dramatic Perspectives (Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1972), p. 47, and Pearse, p. 35.

53. Waith, "Characterization," 163.

to support his ethical tableaux. These minor figures necessarily function mechanically and, in the space of the main action, acquire few identifiable characteristics. (Polydor and Lucippe in The Mad Lovers, Cloe in The Faithful Shepherdess, Pharamond in Philaster come first to mind.) Fletcher's minor figures do not convince, and their habitual place in the happy dénouement alongside his major characters jars the vindication of virtue which he assigns to all. While Fletcher's dénouements may not satisfy as much as Shakespeare's, this is not because they are morally more ambivalent or inconsistent but because they are dramatically so.

I argued earlier that it is precisely by the degree of sympathy which Shakespeare elicits for his victims that the tragicomic question of moral security is important. Fletcher's typically neat vindications of divine order and moral behaviour (excluding, perhaps, the residual doubts ending Philaster) are symptomatic of his hypothetical approach. While this is in keeping with the characteristics of tragicomedy already outlined, it is apparent that Shakespeare does more with the form. Massinger, as the successor of Shakespeare and Fletcher, seems to exploit both kinds. His tragicomic practice, under Fletcher, is similarly cross-referential and symbolic. But he also pays more attention to pathos and the motivation of character than Fletcher; and is concerned, as his tendency to write the last act of the collaborated plays suggests,⁵⁴ with the Shakespearean uncertain tragicomic ending.

54. See Lawless, p. 19, and Hoy's discussion of the plays showing Massinger's hand, note 43 above.

Cyrus Hoy ascertains the hand of Massinger in twenty of the "Beaumont and Fletcher" plays. Of these, Massinger has a hand in the final acts of seventeen, and initiates the first acts of thirteen. That is, he shows a marked tendency to "envelop" the action.⁵⁵ This, I suggest, is because Massinger is interested to establish the kind of symmetrical structure outlined above, and to introduce and confirm the issues, responses and images pursued in the collaborated plays. On the whole the division of labour results in Massinger's serious and Fletcher's comic and spectacular parts. Massinger's usual control of the last act makes use of Fletcher's sub-plot, performing the kind

55. Hoy, 15 (1962), 85-86. I am indebted to this and Bertha Hensman's study of collaboration, The Shares of Fletcher, Field and Massinger in Twelve Plays of the Beaumont and Fletcher Canon, Jacobean Drama Studies (Salzburg: Salzburg Studies in English Literature, No. 6, 1974). I shall not discuss collaboration in any detail and accept their determination of the shares of Fletcher, Field and Massinger in the plays discussed below, which are shown here diagrammatically.

The Queen of Corinth:

I	II	III	IV	V
M	Fl.	Field		M

The Custom of the Country:

I	II	III	IV	V
Fl.	M	i-iii, iv-v	i-ii, iii-v	i-iv, v/199
		Fl.	M	Fl. M

A Very Woman:

I	II	III	IV	V
M	i-iii, ¹⁸⁵ iii	Fl.	i, ii, iii	M
			M Fl.	

of parody made by Bessus of Arbaces in A King and No King.⁵⁶

In The Queen of Corinth Massinger introduces two hypothetical characters of the Machiavel kind, elaborating the intrigue with their combined deception of the courtiers in an unremitting attack on virtue, most severely by the rape of Merione. Further, Massinger establishes an environment in which moral complexities qualify all but the most virtuous. The maxim that

Where benefits
Are ill conferr'd, as to unworthy men,
That turn them to bad uses, the bestower
For wanting judgement how, and on whom to place
them,
Is partly guilty (The Queen of Corinth, I, 8) 57

questions an entire moral code, in which the eldest son, Theanor and Crates, do receive and abuse benefits that are "ill-conferred". Fletcher develops this in the second act by having Merione severely question divine order:

Deaf, deaf you gods of goodness, deaf to me,
Deaf Heaven to all my cries; deaf hope, deaf
justice,
I am abus'd, and you, that see all, saw it;
Saw it, and smil'd upon the villain did it
(II, 17).

The success of the Machiavellians in Acts II to IV seems to confirm this. But it is in the last act,

56. On the function of Bessus see Finkelpearl, pp. 158-59 and Neill, p. 330.

57. Waller's edition, volume VI. See note 44 above. References are to act and page number. The edition does not make scene divisions or provide line numbers.

by Massinger, that the hypothesis of morality in an immoral order is examined, and it is here that the moral implications are most important. Theanor and Crates are recognised as atheists, and Theanor's slipped nobility is subsequently revealed:

the Prince
That (as born highest) should have grac'd his
fall
With greatest courage, is so sunk with sorrow,
That to a common judgement he would seem
To suffer like a woman (V,71).

(Theanor does, however, finally reaffirm right values by serving justice on himself.) As the villains are dealt with, moral order is reaffirmed in the nuptial reconciliation.

One of Massinger's favourite rhetorical devices for this purpose is the extended trial scene, and he combines it here with a quite arbitrary legalism introduced to produce a dilemma.⁵⁸ The point that Theanor can expect the punishment of death or marriage as decided by his alleged victims seems to underline the issue of moral action in an ambiguous or complex moral system, and brings it to its critical point. The problem with the trial scene, however, is that the collaborative process fails to develop sympathetic characters. Only Merione really lays claim to our concern, and her vituperative argument with Beliza is shocking, firstly because of the inconsistency of her character, but more importantly because we have the superior knowledge that her demand for justice

58. He dramatises, in fact, a formal Senecan *controversia*, as Waith, The Pattern of Tragicomedy, pp. 188-92, and Hensman, p. 203, point out.

is a charade: Beliza has not been raped; Agenor and Leonidas need respond only to the beauty, not the potential calamity, of the scene. Euphanus does vindicate the process, explaining:

I hop'd the imminent danger of the Prince,
 To which his loose unquenched heats had
 brought him,
 Being pursu'd unto the latest tryal
 Would work in him compunction, which it
 has done;
 And these two Ladies in their feign'd
 contentions,
 To your delight I hope have serv'd as
 Maskers
 To their own Nuptials (V,77).

Chastity and honour are reaffirmed. But the process is a shaky one, it might not have worked; and the foolish Lamprias is still there, reminding us that man always has the potential to deceive himself and be deceived. We are simply lucky to avert tragedy in "this unexpected comedy" (V, 78). Massinger makes the contrasts explicit and manages to raise our concern for virtue, but the restraints on the development of character imposed by the collaborative process fail to focus our sympathies sufficiently to encourage a strong emotional response: Merione is no Desdemona.

Massinger's tendency to introduce the issues, responses and images pursued in a play finds unusual confirmation in The Custom of the Country, written with Fletcher. Here, Fletcher initiates the action with the bizarre custom of the droit de seigneur:

That when a maid is contracted,
 And ready for the tie o' the church, the
 governor,

He that commands in chief, must have her
 maidenhead
 (The Custom of the Country, I.i.29-31).⁵⁹

He establishes a contrasting morality with contrasting moral figures and the neatly inverted imagery of nuptial celebrations in the black "emblems of ... honour lost" (I.ii.4). Massinger, however, discards this action and imagery, retaining only the moral identification of Arnolde and Zenocia, the more dubious character of Rutilio, and the underlying hypothesis that although virtue is besieged "Innocence is bold" (II.iii.37). He introduces them into a wholly new action involving the trial of chastity, and produces a new cast of characters, pursuing the theme of honour anew in Duarte's braggart misconception, and in the dilemmas of Arnolde and Guiomar.⁶⁰

Massinger's Act II establishes an oscillating pattern of misfortune and subsequent fortunate accident, which leads in turn to misfortune again. The fortunes of Arnolde and Zenocia on the one hand and Rutilio on the other alternate in a scissor-like movement in which Fortune is never rejected as totally capricious, nor wholly vindicated in terms of justice. This structure confirms Arnolde's chastity in the burlesque of gigolos in general and the exhausted Rutilio in particular. Fletcher further exploits Massinger's imagery of ambiguous

59. Appleton notes that the initial hypothesis is Fletcher's, p. 86. Hensman considers it and the title of the play to have only a box-office appeal, pp. 109-10.

60. See Leech, pp. 57-58 and Waith, The Pattern of Tragicomedy, pp. 188-89, for a discussion of the use of dilemma in The Custom of the Country.

fortune in Acts III and IV: "blind Fortune, / Thou hast the prettiest changes" (III.ii.37-38); "Fortune, that ruins all" (III.ii.144); "Under what angry star is my life governed?" (IV.iii.202); and "Another smile, / Another trick of Fortune to betray us!" (IV.iii.204-05). But this ambiguity is most powerfully expressed in Massinger's superbly ironic interpretation of Sulpitia's spell. While the audience or reader is aware that the disease to be cured is unnatural, still

piety forbids that we [the characters] should
question
What is decreed above, or ask a reason
Why Heaven determines this or that way of us
(V.ii.140-42).

Those on stage cannot know how fate is determined, there can be no discrimination between justice and accident, and one cannot even securely recognise the subversion of fate.

The Custom of the Country is a more solid play than The Queen of Corinth,⁶¹ in terms of both the symmetrical structure of hypothetical characters and the greater degree of sympathy it manages to arouse. While the fortunes of Zenocia, Arnolfo and Guiomar are shaded rather than dark, their role as potential victims is not casual.

As a collaboration, the play balances along the line of the characteristic style and concerns typical

61. There is a great deal of disagreement over the structural success of the play. Leech considers it to be confused, p. 57. Appleton, on the other hand, admires "the sheer technical dexterity with which three stories are woven together", p. 86.

of Fletcher and Massinger. Bertha Hensman suggests that

Massinger's restrained and classical treatment of his share of the plot alternates with the Renaissance exuberance of Fletcher's share, and acts as a restraint upon it in the same way that the author's exhortations to rectitude temper ... the bawdry of the Italianate novella.⁶²

She suggests that Fletcher's idiom of semi-satirical romance is in the manner of Cervantes; Massinger's is Theophrastan or Jonsonesque.⁶³ Massinger's characters, as a result, tend to become rhetorical mouth-pieces. Manuel de Sosa's censure of Duarte is a good example:

Prosperity does search a gentleman's temper
More than his adverse fortune. I have known
Many, and of rare parts, from their success
In private duels, raised up to such a pride,
And so transform'd from what they were, that
all
That loved them truly wish'd they had fallen
in them.
I need not write examples (II.i.46-52).

He then goes on to make example of Duarte. The simple function of Massinger's rhetoric is to signal the moral properties of his, and Fletcher's, characters. While it may be going too far to say that it confines Fletcher's moral excesses in the stews, still,

Massinger subordinates the purely comic role of Rutilio to the Jonsonesque humour of Durarte, and in so doing imposes a philosophical, structural unity upon the sub-plot.⁶⁴

62. Hensman, p. 109.

63. Hensman, p. 110.

64. Hensman, p. 116.

The weakness of the play lies in the mechanical problems of collaboration. There are inconsistencies between Fletcher's and Massinger's mode of characterisation, and a serious disproportion in Fletcher's temporary subordination of the main plot to the subplot.⁶⁵

A Very Woman, Massinger's revision of an older play,⁶⁶ exhibits a clear structural control. Hensman's view is that

In reconstructing A Very Woman Massinger grounded his new plot, drawn from Burton's Anatomy of Melancholy, firmly in Act II, Scene ii, and Act V, Scene iv. In between these outer limits of his new structure, he wrote scenes which were supporting arches for the new plot. Then between these 'arches' he compressed most of the plot of the original play.⁶⁷

Massinger discusses his theme, "the want / Of civil manners, nay ingratitude" (A Very Woman, I.i.120-21), in a pattern of contrasts. Cardenes and Don John, Cardenes and Almira, Don John and Almira, the qualifying love relationship of Pedro and Leonora, and the burlesque of Borachia's relation to John as a slave, exploit multiple moral situations and reveal several claims on Almira, the very woman. The contrasting imagery of riches and poverty defines these

65. Hensman, pp. 121-22.

66. See Baldwin Maxwell, Studies in Beaumont, Fletcher, and Massinger (1939; London: Frank Cass, 1966), p. 180; Hensman, pp. 320-21; Hoy, 9 (1957), 154-55; Roma Gill, "Collaboration and Revision in Massinger's A Very Woman," Review of English Studies NS 17 (1967), 137.

67. Hensman, p. 335.

relationships in terms of the paradox that poverty is wealth. This defines Almira's love for John as a slave - she recognises true virtue beyond the trappings of nobility, which to some extent mitigates the glib morality by which Don John accedes to her love the second time around.⁶⁸

Massinger controls this symmetry in the hypothetical sickness and cure of love melancholy.⁶⁹ Cardenes and Almira, whose "uncivil" romance initiates the conflicts of the play, resolve them by means of the cure of melancholy:

The discords of my soul
Are tun'd, and make a heavenly harmony
(IV.ii.158-59).

In such a scheme, Massinger does tend to be Jonsonesque: Cardenes and Almira are his most obvious humour characters. And the easy process of Fortune, despite Don John's apparent set-backs, weakens any of the tragic potential of suffering.

Even so, Massinger does not simply vindicate divine order in the dénouement. The resolution of the play depends on Cardenes' realisation that

Destinie ...
... brewing [honey and gall] together suffers
not
One man to pass before he drinks this mixture.

68. A problem raised by Philip Edwards in "Massinger the Censor," Essays on Shakespeare and Elizabethan Drama in Honor of Hardin Craig, ed. Richard Hosley (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963), p. 344.

69. Hensman, pp. 328-36; Gill, pp. 145-48.

Hence is it we have not an hour of life
 In which our pleasures relish not some pain,
 Our sows some sweetness (IV.ii.84-89).

The paradoxes of existence are necessary and, in this case, acceptable.

The tendency of tragicomedy, in sounding moral issues, to suspend them between alternatives in this way is conventional. Its most marked characteristic is a hypothetical structuring of issues as dilemmas or paradoxes. While this may make it less emotionally immediate, less painful than tragedy, the interest in ambiguity is the same. This doubleness was described by Una Ellis-Fermor as a "middle-mood".⁷⁰ Jacqueline Pearson similarly argues for a characteristically tragicomic double vision:

a critical ability to see events simultaneously in very different ways.⁷¹

In Massinger's best tragicomedies this simultaneity is romantic and satiric, and involves the undercutting of the given conventions of romance.

70. Ellis-Fermor, pp. 204-05.

71. Jacqueline Pearson, Tragedy and Tragicomedy in the Plays of John Webster (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1980), p. 33.

CHAPTER III. ROMANCE AND SATIRE: THE MORAL
STRUCTURE OF MASSINGER'S COMEDIES
AND TRAGICOMEDIES

In this chapter discussing an untidy group of plays which do not cohere satisfactorily in terms of theme, structure or moral perspective, I shall have recourse to a framework in terms of satire and romance. I have sought anxiously for Massinger's moral reservations in the group as a whole. Because the group of plays is a somewhat artificial one (it consists of those plays of single authorship which are not tragedies, and betrays inconsistency in the variety of formal ascriptions anyway¹) there is, naturally, no sustained uncertainty. In fact, Massinger's morality is more often quite certain. There is, however, some ambiguity in some of the plays. Given the inconsistency in the moral product, it seems necessary to identify the basis of Massinger's morally certain plays, and the cause of the ambiguity in the others. To do this I shall categorize the plays as satiric, where satire exposes or discovers vice, and romantic, where romance idealises and demonstrates virtue. The plays in which the structure is simply satiric or simply romantic usually express a certain morality. Plays in which it is mixed tend to be uncertain.

1. Formal ascriptions on the title-pages of the first published editions include "An Antient Storie", "A Tragaecomédie", "A Comoedie", and "A Comicall Historie"; and in the case of The Maid of Honour there is no ascription. Further, The Picture described on the title-page as a tragicomedy on its first publication is also described as a "true ... History" above the first act heading. See the facsimile title pages in the Oxford Massinger. The plays of this group are described as comic or tragicomic in Annals of the English Drama, ed.

Massinger's comic morality is basically satiric. From certain moral postulates he examines and "scourges" hypothetical types. The moral definition includes positive statements of virtue, but the satirical thrust is negative, uncovering examples of vice and reproving folly. His tragicomic morality is basically romantic. From certain moral postulates he examines and demonstrates hypotheses of character or action. The moral definition is positive, focusing on the good characters and educating the bad by their example. The moral themes and the tone of his satiric and romantic plays are usually quite different, but they have in common both a definite moral function (to vindicate virtue), and hypothetical types of vice or virtue. But not all of Massinger's tragicomedies are morally definite.

I shall suggest that while his satiric comedies (A New Way to Pay Old Debts and The City Madam) are generally firm in moral tone, and the simply romantic tragicomedies (The Emperor of the East, The Renegado, The Bashful Lover and The Guardian) "teach" morals (like good government, in The Emperor), those tragicomedies with both hypothetical romance characteristics and a satirical process of discovery tend to be morally uncertain (The Bondman, The Picture), or confused (The Maid of Honour and The Parliament of Love). It will be necessary to leave discussion of the uncertain plays until later, but it may be

Alfred Harbage, rev. S. Schoenbaum, 2nd ed. (London: Methuen, 1964). Such categorization is, of course, always arbitrary, and was extremely so in the seventeenth century.

worth while to note that some of them produce only a confused or dubious morality, and the romance dilemma may produce ambiguity by itself. That is, the mixture of satire and romance is not inherently ambiguous, and we may find some moral uncertainty in the uniform satiric and romantic plays.²

A New Way to Pay Old Debts, Massinger's most popular play, has generally received critical approval, except from Abraham Wright, commenting around 1640, who called it

A silly play. ye plot but ordinary wch is ye cheating of an vsurer beeing ye plot of a great many plaies, at least a maine passage in them. but for ye lines they are very poore, noe expressions, but onely plaine downright relating ye matter; [wthout] any new dress either of language or fancy.³

Wright's comments usefully call to mind Marlowe's The Jew of Malta, Shakespeare's The Merchant of Venice, besides Middleton's A Trick to Catch the Old One and Dekker's The Shoemaker's Holiday. It may be as well to say here that Massinger's version of Sir Giles Overreach does not really benefit by a comparison with Shylock. Massinger never allows us to sympathise with Overreach, whose unremitting appetite for gain is only less bloody than that of Marlowe's Barabas.

2. As my discussion is organised in terms of satiric, romantic and mixed treatment I have not tried to treat the plays in chronological order, nor am I interested to imply biographical developments in Massinger's dramatic career.

3. "Abraham Wright's excerpts and comments (c. 1640)", Appendix, Oxford Massinger, II, 379.

T.A. Dunn, in Philip Massinger: The Man and the Playwright, suggested that

by making Shylock pitiable Shakespeare has drawn his superhuman malefactor back into the fold of common humanity. Massinger ... is more chargeable, morally and aesthetically, for keeping Overreach outside of it.⁴

If Shylock is a superhuman malefactor I fail to see why it should be moral to sympathise with him. And I cannot see why Massinger's satiric consistency is an aesthetic weakness when Shakespeare's inconsistency is apparently not. For Shakespeare, as for Massinger, the problem was to uncover the baser motives of his villain by the subterfuges of innocents. The apparent inconsistency (for modern auditors) of a cunning and worldly-wisely innocent Portia is, however, a convention of satire. Both Shakespeare and Massinger establish a thorough and precise duality by which characters and their motives are defined. Act I in A New Way establishes two groups and the premises by which they act, namely society governed by degree and noblesse oblige against social ambition and appetite.⁵ Massinger uses the noble party to comment on and invalidate the appetitive values of Overreach, Marrall and Greedy. The satiric structure, in other words, requires a militant virtue which "scourges" vice

4. Dunn, pp. 124-25.

5. As J. de Vos has pointed out:

"The whole of this comedy is based on the opposition between Overreach and Wellborn".

J. de Vos, "Philip Massinger and Dramatic Construction," Studia Germanica Gandensia, 10 (1968), 74. John O. Lyons sees the opposition

(I borrow the term from The City Madam, IV.iv.61).
The convention has an inherent difficulty, for
modern auditors, in that avenging Christians (in
The Merchant) are like the incongruous allegorical
figure of a militant Peace.

Massinger secures his satire by the self-
denunciation of Overreach. In response to Lovell's
question.

Are you not frightened with the imprecations,
And curses, of whole families, made wretched
By your sinister practises?

he replies

Yes as rocks are
When foamie billowes split themselues against
Their flinty ribbes; or as the Moone is
mo'u'd,
When wolues with hunger pin'd, howle at her
brightnesse.
I am of a solid temper, and like these
Steere on a constant course: with mine owne
sword
If call'd into the field, I can make that
right,
Which fearefull enemies murmur'd at as wrong.
Now for these other pidling complaints
Breath'd out in bitterness, as when they call
me
Extortioner, Tyrant, Cormorant, or Intruder
On my poore Neighbours right, or grand
incloser
Of what was common to my priuate vse;
Nay, when my eares are pierc'd with Widdowes
cries,
And vndon Orphants wash with teares my
threshold;
I only think what 'tis to have my daughter
Right honorable; and 'tis a powerfull
charme

as between Overreach on the one hand and Wellborn and
Lovell on the other. John O. Lyons, "Massinger's
Imagery," Renaissance Papers, - (1955), 51.

Makes me insensible of remorse, or pitty,
 Or the least sting of Conscience.
 (A New Way to Pay Old Debts, IV.i.111-131).

Leslie Stephen argued:

Put this into the third person; read 'he' for 'I', and 'his' for 'my', and it is an admirable bit of denunciation ... It is a description of a wicked man from outside ... When it is converted ... into the villain's own account of himself, the internal logic which serves as a pretext disappears, and he becomes a mere monster.⁶

Massinger's "logic" is not the internal logic of character and its motivation, but satirical examination. The conventional images of oppression mark the passage as "auto-satirical". Just as Overreach overreaches himself and falls by the folly of his ambitions, so he satirises his own evil. There is a similar complexity in his simultaneous pretensions to and cynicism about nobility. Overreach's self-recrimination vindicates his satirical destruction by the intrigues of the noble party. It is precisely this auto-satirical self-recrimination by Overreach that defines the counter-intrigues as good.

Few critics, however, are happy with the performance of Wellborn and Lovell in counter-attack. Robert Fothergill considers Wellborn to be "little better than the crook he is outwitting".⁷ David Frost suggests that Overreach

6. Stephen, pp. 35-36.

7. Peter Quennell, The Singular Preference: Portraits and Essays (London: Collins, 1952), p. 41. See also Isabella Blumenstock Marinoff,

is overcome by a shabby trick engineered by the nephew whose moral corruption has equalled his own. There is no difference in kind between the methods of Sir Giles in ruining his victims and those of the virtuous characters who conspire against him. His standards have not been overthrown.⁸

The problem is one of satiric method. In its most extreme form it allows D.J. Enright's interpretation of Overreach as the real hero. Massinger, he argues, fails

to present any positive standards strong enough to counteract the poetic effect of Sir Giles.⁹

He even suggests that Overreach is not overcome.¹⁰ The moral status of Massinger's satirists are, however, clearly signalled by the tag-names which define virtue and vice in a morality structure. These differences are made even more explicit by the social distinction between well-bred virtue

"The Dramatic Art of Philip Massinger: the Moral and Spiritual Quest," Diss. Yale 1980, pp. 46-47; and Alexander Leggatt, Citizen Comedy in the Age of Shakespeare (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973), p. 68.

8. Frost, p. 97.

9. D.J. Enright, "Elizabethan and Jacobean comedy," in The Age of Shakespeare, ed. Boris Ford, 2nd ed. (1955; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982), pp. 471-72, 479.

10. D.J. Enright, "Poetic Satire and Satire in Verse: A Consideration of Jonson and Massinger," Scrutiny, 18 (1951-52), 222.

and vulgar vice.¹¹ Massinger's answer to the dramatic persuasiveness of Overreach is not entirely convincing as his moral and social vindications are simply conditions to be accepted as given, but they do explain the right of Wellborn and Lovell to pay Overreach back as morally and socially acceptable.

Massinger maintains the two sets of intrigues, on and by Overreach, exactly in terms of antithesis - "a strange Antipathie / Between vs, and true Gentry" (II.i.88-89). Moreover, there is a constant satiric pressure in the tension between Overreach and his daughter Margaret. Her virtue is thrown into relief by his vice, producing moral shadows with a patterned effect.

Both characters are hypothetical. There is no confusion in our sympathy for Margaret (however pale¹²) and in our antipathy to Overreach. They form the moral leitmotif of the play. To suppose a character to be an extortioner, tyrant, cormorant and intruder is not really disturbing. It would be if Overreach's ambitions were not so cynical and if Margaret enjoyed the rewards of them. Instead, Massinger clearly signals his moral postulates. Margaret confesses "I pittie her [Lady Downfalne's] fortune" and is rebuked "Pittie her? Trample on her" (III.ii.42).

11. As Frederick M. Burelbach, Jr., points out, "A New Way to Pay Old Debts: Jacobean Morality," College Language Association Journal, 12 (1969), 208-09, 212.

12. "Margaret remains a feeble heroine and her love story has no vitality", Patricia Thomson, "The Old Way and the New Way in Dekker and Massinger," The Modern Language Review, 51 (1956), 177.

The satiric pressure is simply maintained by the vigour with which Massinger develops the intrigues against Overreach. We find the final satirical thrust in the energetic and elaborate irony of Overreach's misconceived success:

as an entrance to her [Margaret's] place
of Honour,
Set your Ladyship on her left hand, and make
coursies
When she nodd on you; which you must
receiue
As a speciall fauour (V.i.105-8);

Haue your redeem'd ragges
Made you thus insolent? (115-16);

and

there's a certaine buz
Of a stolne marriage, do you heare? Of a
stolne marriage,
In which 'tis said there's some body hath beene
coozin'd.
I name no parties (122-25).

The joke on Overreach is energetic, and perhaps disguises the toughness of the satire, avoiding the kind of sympathetic fool we make of Malvolio in Shakespeare's Twelfth Night. Even so, the ending is necessarily tough. Because the character of appetite is physical and brutal, the programme which brings Overreach to madness is therefore a physical scourge.

It is as though his immoral principles are attacked physically, in order to circumvent this pursuit of wealth and social ambition. The defeat of Overreach's "sinister practises" destroys his rationale for action and controverts his immoral security, as Patricia Thomson

argues.¹³ The billows break the rock, the wolves move the moon. Because the hypothetical evil is so perversely complete its defeat shows it not only wrong but impossible.¹⁴

A New Way to Pay Old Debts has a strong moral structure. It even suggests modified allegory, for example, in the figure of Justice Greedy who specifically expresses the appetitive characteristic of avarice.¹⁵

To return to Abraham Wright's criticisms, the play is stylistically plain. This is symptomatic of Massinger's stringent moral interest here. The direct moral action and the satirical structure preclude the idealising character of romance. The romanticism of Young Allworth's love for Margaret is subsidiary, satirised as a whimsical folly (I.i.125-33). Massinger tends to adapt little of the idealism or lyric ornament of romance to this play and seems, as a result, apparently threadbare

13. Thomson, p. 170:

"Overreach must either bend society to his will or be subdued to society. He fails to break the social fabric and therefore he himself is broken".

14. While Overreach may be a pathological villain rather than the figure of an alternative world view as Kathleen McLuskie argues, "The Plays and the Playwrights: Satiric Drama," in The Revels History, p. 221, it should be pointed out that the business of satire is usually with social vice, not an alternative tragic vision.

15. Burelbach sees Greedy more as a comic Vice than a humours character, p. 209. Marinoff also suggests a fairly detailed allegorical interpretation, p. 50.

in his characterisation of virtue. But the moral basis of his play is the satirical exposure of vice, rather than a demonstration of virtue. He adopts satire again, and this time more clearly, for his next city comedy, The City Madam.

Like A New Way, The City Madam is complicated by the satirical function of its villain. Luke is typical of the Renaissance satirist,¹⁶ simply needing

The power in you to scourge a generall vice,
And rise up a new Satyrist
(The City Madam, IV.iv.61-62).

The whole action of the play is informed by the satirical exposure of pride or vainglory and avarice. It pursues these in the satire of the city madams, and the prodigal merchant apprentices and their low-life friends. But the agent of this satire is Luke: he degrades the city madams and impounds the apprentices on their bond. The problem is that Luke is also the major exemplum of avarice in the play. Massinger signals this by his worship of the conventional properties of avarice (in III.iii).

Part of the difficulty is that the exemplary Luke of the beginning shows no sign that his virtue was "dissimulation" (V.iii.25). The only real hint I can find early in the play is Frugal's warning

Outward gloss
Often deceivs, may it not prove so in him,
And yet my long acquaintance with his nature
Renders me doubtful (I.iii.152-55).

16. See Alvin Kernan, The Cankered Muse (1959; Connecticut: Archon Books, 1976), pp. 107-08.

This potential hypocrisy is only a suspicion, and there is no signal from Luke himself until late in the play.¹⁷ Luke's satirical role calls for a moralising standard, the kind of Luke we find at the beginning. The avaricious example calls for an unremitting baseness, the kind of Luke we find at the end. Between the (apparently) virtuous and vicious poles in Acts I and V Luke's moral status is ambiguous. From:

'tis not fit
I should look upward, much lesse hope for
mercy (III.ii.16-17);

in my nature
I was ever liberall, my Lord you know it,
Kind, affable (III.ii.128-30);

"I am inexorable" (IV.ii.104); his nature "alter'd"
(IV.ii.118); through the confession

I grant[earlier] I talk'd
For some ends to my self conceal'd, of pitie
(IV.iii.39-40);

to

in my self I find
What I have once decreed, shall know no
change (V.iii.46-47),

we follow a moral metamorphosis. Luke's morality is dubious, but it is also sufficiently vague (at

17. Dunn suggests that:

"Massinger ... has dropped too few indications of Luke's real nature early in the play. So when his true nature does become apparent, we feel less the wonder proper to the drama of surprise than bewilderment at being misled",
p. 126.

Compare A.H. Cruickshank:

least until IV.iii.39-40) that his "power to scourge" may possibly be morally well-intentioned, to act

not in revenge
Of your base usage of me, but to fright
Others by your example (IV.iv.133-35).

The thematic concerns of Acts I to III principally follow the city madam and apprentice plots. By Act IV the vain-glorious and the prodigals have suffered for their folly at the hand of Luke as "a new Satyrist" (IV.iv.62). So Acts IV and V shift to the scourging of Luke at the hand of John Frugal. This structure corresponds to Luke's shifting moral status.¹⁸ While he is a satirist his moral complexion remains unclear; it becomes suspiciously dark in Act IV and his viciousness is apparent in Act V, at which stage the action shifts to the satire of avarice.¹⁹

The function of the ambiguity here, then, is morally defined. It allows Massinger to use Luke as a satirist, and then as the object of satire.²⁰

"Indications of his future development are skilfully given from time to time, so that when this alarming person at length shows himself in his true colours we shiver without being surprised", A.H. Cruickshank, Philip Massinger (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1920), p. 31.

18. Fothergill, p. 76.

19. Martin Butler points out the accumulation of references to devilishness in Acts IV and V: IV.ii.82; IV.iii.46, 65; V.i.26-28, 47; V.ii.5, 54, 83, 85. Martin Butler, "Massinger's The City Madam and the Caroline Audience," Renaissance Drama, NS 13 (1982), 183.

20. The technique is like Jonson's. See Kernan, pp. 156-62.

This second satire, however, has problems of its own. Massinger is forced to transform John Frugal into another satirist with little preparation. Frugal is not even an exemplary figure to start with. He is a merchant with profit motives (I.iii.37) who also overindulges his family, and simply assumes the merits of his pretended monastic vow to condemn Luke. This problem would, of course, be easily managed in production by making Frugal more dignified at the beginning,²¹ but it betrays some inconsistency in the moral framework, suggesting that Massinger may have changed his mind after possibly planning to originally include Frugal in a satirical exposure by a virtuous Luke.

The play as it stands is more complex and interesting. Luke's moral reversal provides a theatrical shock, and Massinger includes a strong dose of spectacle to maintain the hypothetical characteristic of his satire. But the structure is more than interesting, it is coherent. The guilt and regeneration of the city madams and apprentices parallels Luke's guilt and degeneration. The satirical process of discovery is black comedy, if comic at all. It gains security from the disguised manipulations of Frugal. And it provides a moral framework by which social evils are discovered, and inherent evils eliminated (or transported to America). More fundamentally, the framework of reversal by which Luke is discovered to be the opposite to virtue prepares for the reversal to modesty in the other plot.

21. Butler argues that Frugal is presented as wholly regular and distinguished from the very beginning, pp. 165-68.

Massinger's city comedies are usually taken to be the expression of a traditional distaste for and satirical abuse of the nouveau riche. Massinger probably is a spokesman for the ancien riche but his social vision is not as restrictive as usually supposed. While in A New Way "in the end all his characters stay well within their destined circles",²² The City Madam achieves a social balance by means of the satirical education of the city madams, and allows a class inter-marriage between the city daughters and gentry sons.²³ Massinger's satirical methods are clear, but he does allow some positive values to come out of the process.

The satirical exposure of vice in the city comedies is a negative process. The satirist or satirists need only a sketched virtue, and their moral definition is reinforced by exercise against hypothetical vice of a "humorous" or allegorical kind. Because one of the benchmarks of dramatic criticism is psychologically "real" motivation and characterisation,²⁴ the virtue assumed by satire against a hypothetical vice often seems undeveloped.²⁵

22. Putt, p. 107. The marriage of Margaret and young Allworth may challenge this.

23. Butler, p. 174. Butler argues that Massinger is not a middle class satirist. For this view see Alan Gerald Cross, "Social Change and Philip Massinger," Studies in English Literature, 7 (1967), 329-42.

24. See Bradbrook, pp. 49-51, 61-62.

25. We find this assumption, for example, in Cruickshank's suggestion that

"Massinger saw how effective on the stage a sudden change of character might be, but

Massinger's tragicomedies redress this by characterising virtuous exempla more fully. Like the city comedies, however, character is still hypothetical, only now the hypotheses define virtue. That is, the moral demonstration of virtue is a positive process.

The best examples of this are The Emperor of the East and The Renegado, the one controlled by a political exemplum, the other by a religious one.

Contemporary reactions to The Emperor of the East were mixed.²⁶ Aston Cokaine probably admired the "pattern" of Pulcheria who organises the moral structure of the first part of the play. Massinger's detractors might have objected to the disjunction between Acts I to III and IV and V, and the moral diffusion which results from it.

The coherence of The City Madam is a product of the satirical function of Luke, bridging the separate themes and plots of Acts I to III and IV to V. Massinger attempts to bridge the two parts of The Emperor in the same way. Pulcheria is not, however, necessary to the two parts of this play as Luke was in the above comedy. Philip Edwards, in his introduction to the play in the Oxford edition, hints that Pulcheria just may function satirically.²⁷ Arthur Kirsch paves the

lacked the necessary art to make it convincing", p. 76.

26. Aston Cokaine claimed The Emperor of the East "is a patterne of too high a reach" (Aston Cokaine's prefatory verse, 31) yet it was "cri'd down" (William Singleton's prefatory verse, 4), and "suffer'd by the rage, / And envie of some Catos of the stage" (Prologue at Court, 15-16), in the Oxford Massinger, III.

27. Oxford Massinger, III, 394.

way by arguing that the Fletcherian tragicomic form is

indebted to both Guarini and Jonson, ... [it] at once encompasses and dilutes the polarities of romance and satire.²⁸

If her scourge of the political diseases of the Projector and his colleagues (The Emperor of the East, I.ii), her exposure of the folly of Theodosius' "excesse / In giving" (III.ii.4-5), and her subjection of Athenais' "wilfull follie" (III.iv.98) are satirical, her function, even her presence, in Acts IV to V is merely incidental.

Massinger grafts the new theme of jealousy on to the play by amplifying Athenais's resentment in Act IV. Jealousy is a hypothetical passion which distorts her earlier characteristics. Chrysapius is also made alarmingly Machiavellian. This new action introduces the absurd jealousy of Theodosius and the centre of sympathy shifts from Pulcheria to the now suspected Athenais (in IV.iv). The highly sensational treatment of the bizarre stage business with the apple is symptomatic of Massinger's loss of moral control. There is little dramatic development, and he ends up piecing the action together from Richard II and Othello.²⁹ Pulcheria makes only one rather mechanical three-line speech in the last

28. Arthur C. Kirsch, Jacobean Dramatic Perspectives (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1972), p. 38.

29. Oxford Massinger, III, 391-92. See also David Frost, p. 117: we find Massinger "standing on his head trying to imitate the master". M.J. Thorssen also sees The Emperor as an unsuccessful variation on the plot of Othello. M.J. Thorssen, "Massinger's

scene of the play, and her last real influence on the action is her envy of Athenais (IV.iv.21-22 - some 680 lines from the end and completely inconsistent with her earlier moral character).

The Emperor as a whole struggles through some silly action to a gratuitous moral conclusion, and it gets there with some dubious distortion of the characters of Acts I to III. One might expect that contemporary theatregoers were critical of this fault, and one might suppose that Cokaine pardoned the flaws of the last two acts on the merits of the first three, for it is here that Massinger produces a coherent romantic exemplum of virtue.

Pulcheria effects a political decorum as example and as arbiter. Massinger establishes her as the exemplum of justice, physically separating the opposing moral claims of the virtuous Athenais and the corrupt parasites, and arbitrating their claims (I.ii).³⁰ He then interposes Pulcheria as an allegorical figure, or a hypothetical virtue, in the process of educating Theodosius. Pulcheria's moral lesson -

I haue showne you
In a true mirror what fruite growes vpon
The tree of hudwinckt bounty, and what
 dangers
Precipitation in the managing
Your greate affaires produceth (III.iv.150-54) -

is thus both local (Pulcheria demonstrates the results of excess) and allegorical (Justice moderates;

use of Othello in The Duke of Milan," Studies in English Literature, 1500 - 1900, 19 (1979), 313.

30. Compare Marinoff, p. 122.

moderation informs Kingship). The two are not discrete but fused in hypotheses: suppose Pulcheria is a virtuous teacher; suppose virtue is demonstrative. Massinger's method here is like satire, or perhaps satire in reverse: it assumes and demonstrates virtue in a positive way. Pulcheria's allegorical status may extend into Acts IV and V to define the jealousy theme, but if the play as it ends becomes morally confused, the precision of moral definition in the first three acts remains secure.

The Renegado is even more morally precise. Tunis, pagan and exotic, establishes a religious morality play in a romance setting. It even has a hypothetical type of virtue defining and controlling the action in the figure of Francisco. The strong, positive demonstration of virtue does not borrow satirical methods³¹ but collapses the Christian and romantic. The motifs of scripture and romance combine, for example, in the temptations of Donusa's "sugred pills" (The Renegado, IV.iii.74):

The passage to [delight] is nor rough nor
thornie;
No steepe hills in the way which you must
climbe vp;
No monsters to be conquer'd; no
inchantments
To be dissolv'd by counter charmes
(IV.iii.69-72).

31. Colin Gibson, however, argues that

"Massinger's principal alterations to the Spanish narrative [source] consist of the substitution of comic and satirical scenes for a number of episodes displaying Spanish heroism and faithfulness",

This kind of moral environment is very much like Spenser's in The Faerie Queene. To be Christian is a talisman which demonstrates absolute virtue -

What punishment
So ere I vndergoe, I am still a Christian
(III.v.95-96).

Massinger is careful to establish his moral terms in the first part of the play. By Act II we have been made aware of an economic and religious morality, and a god of love, as well as a social definition of fortune and "wandering Planet[s]" (II.i.3). Each has a claim on the passionate Vitelli, and they cohere in the degree to which he subordinates them to his religion.

The moral structure is defined, however, by Francisco who, like Pulcheria in The Emperor, is both virtuous exemplum and arbiter. Francisco's moral function is structural, as the central axis in the two plots.³² In a scissor-like symmetry typical of tragicomedy the fortunes of Vitelli descend as those of Grimaldi recover³³ precisely by the aid of Francisco, who functions as something like a good angel.

Oxford Massinger, II, 3. The sub-plot involving Grimaldi may be comic but it does not seem to be satirical.

32. J. de Vos suggests that "the development is cut up too much into separate parts", p. 74, but this ignores Francisco's dual role connecting the plot and sub-plot.

33. This point has been made by Peter F. Mullany, "Massinger's The Renegado: Religion in Stuart Tragicomedy," Genre, 5 (1972), 146. Mullany, however, sees Francisco merely as a tragicomic lever, p. 149.

Pagans in this play are characterised as somewhat stupid and are described by bestial images.³⁴ The degree of isolation from one's good angel is therefore, allegorically, the degree to which one succumbs to the animal passions. Massinger's morality seems gratuitous, in that Vitelli need only remember that he is Christian to redeem himself, Donusa becomes virtuous only by turning Christian, and Paulina looks immoral because she apparently turns Turk. The play has few merits, primarily because its moral structure is so hypothetically circumscribed. The types of pagan and Christian allow no real moral tension, perhaps because of the basic Christian premise that the pagans are wrong:

Your iugling Prophet ...

... taught a Pigeon to feede in his eare,
Then made his credulous followers beleue
It was an Angell (IV.iii.115-30).³⁵

B.T. Spencer, on the other hand, attributes specific moral qualities to Francisco, although not Jesuit ones. See B.T. Spencer, "Philip Massinger", in Seventeenth Century Studies by Members of the Graduate School of the University of Cincinnati, ed. Robert Shafter (Princeton: Princeton University Press, for the University of Cincinnati, 1933; first series), p. 18.

34. As Francis D. Evenhuis points out, Massinger's animal imagery is not usually complimentary. See Massinger's Imagery, Jacobean Drama Studies (Salzburg: Salzburg Studies in English Literature, No. 14, 1973), pp. 116-23.

35. Plays about Turks are not always clear about their Christian premises, however. See the confused A Christian Turn'd Turk by Daborne, or the absurdities of The Martyr'd Soldier.

Massinger's only other substantially Christian plays are the early The Virgin Martyr (with Dekker) and the late Believe As You List. While both are tragedies, modelled on the narrative genre of Saints' Lives, it is only in the later play that Massinger's handling of virtue is properly tragic. He otherwise abandons the moral constraints of the Christian play in his other romances.

I have dismissed The Great Duke of Florence from my discussion because its inane plot hardly considers moral issues and is too simple even to develop that confusion found, as we shall see, in The Maid of Honour and The Parliament of Love. Massinger struggles to complicate things by converting Cozimo into a furious monarch (The Great Duke of Florence, III.i) and developing a rather pointless intrigue. But he cannot tease out a whole play without making the characters inconsistent. Cozimo's absolutism (V.i.63-4) contradicts his promise of mercy (IV.ii.336-40) and he is reduced to the absurd

Though we know ...
 ... [we will] not
 Know what we understand (V.ii.206-11).

Massinger's only other entirely romantic play is The Bashful Lover. The premises of this play are that love inevitably motivates virtue, and virtue requites love, and it explores these in an entirely romantic field.³⁶ The suitors Galeazzo, Uberti and Lorenzo are types that produce a simple dilemma for

36. "[In] all ways the play is a compendium of ultra-romantic themes", Alfred Harbage, Cavalier Drama. An Historical and Critical Supplement to the Study of the Elizabethan and Restoration Stage (New York: Modern Language Association of America, general series, 1936), p. 161.

Matilda, on the basis of their equal deserving of merit. Massinger rescues her from the dilemma by throwing Fortune in the scale with Virtue to make the bashful Galeazzo, the principal candidate, noble in fact:

Fortune here hath shewn
Her various power; but Vertue in the end
Is crown'd with laurel
(The Bashful Lover, V.iii.189-91).

Technically, the crescendo of revealed plots in Act V is weak³⁷ in that the contenders are simply redefined by circumstances. Lorenzo is "disenchanted" (V.iii.134), and Galeazzo made Lord of Milan, putting Uberti out of the running - "There's no contending against destiny" (V.iii.178). The real complexity of things is avoided rather than resolved.

The play identifies Galeazzo throughout as the most sympathetically virtuous, it is his impossible love (I.i.293-300) and modesty which really appeal in the dilemma. By introducing a benevolent Fortune Massinger circumvents the moral issues, but he also contradicts his moral premise: when "Vertue's but a word: / Fortune rules all" (IV.i.68-69).³⁸ For the lovers in Act IV virtue is assailed by bad fortune and holds out, but the recourse to good fortune in Act V bypasses virtue, making Matilda potentially a kind of lottery prize for Galeazzo.

37. Dunn criticises the ending as unfinished - we have to piece the story together, p. 72.

38. Spencer argues that the morality remains secure because their disavowal of a belief in good and evil is only temporary, p. 40.

The potential of Massinger's dilemma never gets this far, however, because the play is structured by the pursuit of chaste love and the defeat of its opposite. While not entirely symmetrical, the theme of chastity controls the virtuous pursuit of Matilda by Uberti and Galeazzo, and Alonzo's abuse of Maria. The different starting points for the two plots, one to maintain virtue, the other to regain it, inform the romantic use of Fortune. Fortune is bad when virtue is assailed, good when danger is averted. The application is not exact, as the ambiguity of Galeazzo's final good fortune suggests, but Massinger associates fortune with morality by a rhetorical insistence:

If such purity,
Such innocence, an abstract of perfection,
The soul of beauty, vertue, in a word,
A Temple of things sacred, should groan
under
The burthen of oppression, we might
Accuse the Saints, and tax the Powers
above us
Of negligence or injustice (I.ii.73-79);
we may
Accuse the powers above as partial when
A good cause, well defended too, must
suffer
For Want of Fortune (II.iv.6-9);
pittyng Heaven
As it loves goodness, may protect my
friend (II.vii.78-79);
I shall turn Atheist,
If heaven see and suffer this (III.iii.72-3);

and "the aid of Heaven, though slow is sure" (III.iii.92). The rhetorical weight of this becomes convincing, but the logical outcome is ambiguous. Massinger seems to recognise this in the final speech (V.iii.189-91, quoted above): he acknowledges that Fortune's power is "various", but underwrites this with Lorenzo's guarantee that virtue is rewarded.

The Bashful Lover is not really problematic because the rhetoric of Fortune, if not the fortunate working out, is consistent, and because virtue is explicitly sympathetic. The Bondman and The Picture do not sustain moral certainty. Both romantic and satiric, they produce more complicated moral claims and sympathies.

The Bondman, The Picture and The Guardian combine romance and satire but The Guardian is quite different from the others. Despite the combination of a satiric and romantic action developing out of the original comic one, the two plots - Caliste and her lovers in the main plot, Iolante and [hers] in the sub-plot - are separate. To start with, the pairs of Iolante and Calypso, and Caliste and Mirtilla operate in a comic tension which excites questions. How far, for example, does Mirtilla's advice to Caliste, "Sweet Lady, / Do something to deserve [blushes]" (The Guardian, I.ii.143-44), differ from Calypso's advice to Iolante,

A Sea-mans wife may ask relief of her
 Neighbor
 When her husbands bound to the Indies,
 and not blam'd for't (II.ii.15-16)?

The two plots separate in Act III, the sub-plot becoming satiric, the main plot romantic, but because they become fully independent they do not produce the moral of aesthetic ambiguities typical of a mixed romantic and satiric treatment.

Iolante's immorality (clearly signalled at III.vi.5-19, 102-4 by her self-censure) is scourged

in a physical and brutal way. Despite the bed-trick which substitutes Calypso to receive the wounds that "mark thee for / A common strumpet" (III.vi.159-60), it is Iolante who is shown her error. (Calypso's response is simply a curse, "Hell take such visits" (III.vi.187), Iolante's is another subterfuge, but with good intent:

Heaven forgive this feigning,
I being forc'd to't to preserve my life,
To be better spent hereafter (III.vi.210-12).)

The exposure of vice is explicit, and does not confuse the romantic treatment of virtue either by giving Iolante a new romantic status or by making Caliste an agent in her mother's regeneration.

The romantic treatment of love is one of simple demonstration. Philip Edwards, in fact, considers the play to be

so much the stuff of tragicomedy and romance
that is hardly necessary to look for specific
sources.³⁹

It is more like The Bashful Lover than The Emperor of the East in that the recognition of virtuous love constitutes the action, and as in The Bashful Lover our sympathies for Caliste and Caldoro are clear.

The Bondman deals romantically with the noble defence of virtue, but also satirises foolish nobles. This produces two sets of sympathies, one for noble virtue, the other for the downtrodden slaves who end up scourging their masters. The two are reconciled

39. Philip Edwards, Oxford Massinger, IV, 110.

in Pisander who is both a noble and a disguised slave.

Massinger's satire here is like that in The City Madam in that the slaves are not the "Men of such eminent virtues" (The Bondman, II.iii.75) that Pisander claims them to be but are greedy and brutal; and they are reformed in turn by the scourge of noble whips (IV.ii.113-124). With typical symmetry the "Satyrists" are satirised in turn.

Structurally, the main plot is romantic, the sub-plot satiric, but the two interact to define the terms of Pisander's courtship of Cleora in Act V. The romantic terms of love and war, and war for love reiterated throughout Acts I to IV in the main plot define noble love. The bestial sexual and violent pleasures of Cleon, and particularly Asotus with his mother Corisca (II.ii.23-24, 136-41), and the slaves as pseudo-nobles in revenge, define base passion. The two remain isolated and are fairly simple and self-contained. There is some ambiguity in the nobles' scourge of the slave rebellion where Asotus, Cleon and Corisca are returned to rule over them, but the concern with slavery is simply to establish terms of bestiality. Massinger is not really interested in slavery itself,⁴⁰ as the easy reconciliation suggests:

40. Spencer sees the issue of slavery as more fundamental, in support of his demonstration of Massinger's stoicism, pp. 84-87.

I found their natures apt to mutinie
 From your too cruell vsage; and made triall
 How farre they might be wrought on; to
 instruct you
 To looke with more preuention (V.iii.220-25).

There is more ambiguity, perhaps, in the close association of the love-war imagery in the main plot and sub-plot. The ground between the nobles at war -

a rawe young fellow,
 One neuer traind in Armes, but rather
 [fashiond]
 To tilt with Ladyes lips (I.i.50-52) -

and the nobles like Asotus, who stay at home to beat slaves and practise courtship, is uncomfortably close. This tension between the romance virtues and satiric vices relaxes (deliberately) in Act V. Leosthenes and Timagoras pursue a moral action on ambiguous grounds here. Pisander's courtship of Cleora is suspiciously noble anyway,⁴¹ but the moral claim which Leosthenes makes, of

the Rape
 Shee has done vpon her honour, with my
 wrong (IV.iv.75-76),

borrowes the imagery of the satirical sub-plot. The ambiguity is not critical because, in moral terms,

41. A.L. Bennett finds his restraint extraordinary, "The Moral Tone of Massinger's Dramas," Papers on Language and Literature, 2 (1966), 215. Marinoff also finds his temperance unattractive, p. 171. Spencer explains it in terms of the Platonic code of love, p. 64.

Pisander and Cleora are shown to be above the social scale of virtue followed by both the slaves and the nobles.⁴²

The Bondman is a labyrinthine play and it is difficult to trace its plots thematically. What is the significance, for example, of the marriage of Olimpia to the disguised slave Poliphron, or of the disguised Timandra's reconciliation with Leosthenes? The disguise motif in each obviously parallels Pisander's disguised nobility, but I have been unable to discover how this repetition helps define rather than confuse the theme of noble love. The play achieves some thematic coherence, however, by the image patterns of virtuous and vicious emotion in the romantic and satiric plots. Cleora and Pisander are defined by the moral status they achieve within these patterns. While the collapse of the pattern in Act V is ambiguous (Leosthenes and Timagoras may appear to be morally quite ugly), the ambiguity is resolved by the power of virtuous love to survive it (as in Philaster). Love becomes a kind of retrospective motif to make peace of the discords of war (in the love-war imagery), and generates the tragicomic ending in reconciliation.

The Picture has a more coherent structure and one that is typical of tragicomedy. In parallel plots Massinger examines virtue abroad and at home. Mathias and Sophia, to different degrees, derive

42. McLuskie argues for a more serious confusion in which love and honour are erotic and pathological in a merely exciting way, pp. 199-200.

their virtuous actions from faith in the fidelity of the other. Massinger's hypothesis is to assume two virtuous characters who reinforce each other morally and separate them to see what might happen; he then introduces typical virtue-breakers (Honorio, Ubaldo and Ricardo) to test them.

This parallel action allows ironies in the shifting of perception which governs virtuous action. Mathias' magic picture, of course, provides a more obvious security, in contrast with Sophia who has only constancy and faith to support her. Both collapse, however, on the premise that the other is unfaithful. Sophia argues

Chastity
Thou onely art a name, and I renounce thee,
I am now a servant to voluptuousness
(The Picture, III.vi.156-58).

Mathias, in response,

now ... hold[s] ... temperance a sinne
Worse then excesse, and what was vice a
vertue (IV.i.68-69).

The violence of the reversal, especially in Mathias, is surprising and uncharacteristic, and Massinger only secures his changes in character here by reference to the humour of passion (IV.i.51-52). This is consistent, as passion and melancholy define the weaknesses of virtue earlier (I.i.136, II.i.37-53), but it is perhaps unattractive to auditors who might expect an Othello-like reversal.

The moral solution to this insecure morality comes in the dénouement. The climax of the play,

and the part where Massinger takes all his risks on behalf of spectacle and surprise, is in the scenes of reversal. Moral security is returned with Sophia's realisation that "Howere my Lord offend, it is no warrant" (IV.ii.10), and she henceforth figures as a paradigm in the same way as Pulcheria in The Emperor of the East.

My analysis of the play so far does not suggest any real moral complexity. But the play is not a simple morality either. The appearance of a secular morality - in the lines "As my better Angel/ You shall direct and guide mee" (I.i.193-94), for example - is a false start. The "better angel", as it happens, supplies Mathias with the picture, encouraging his "curious" (I.i.176) morality. The play really becomes complex as the product of its two satirical sub-plots. In the sub-plot of Ladislaus' dotage we find a simple narrative-like satire: Eubulus is sharply critical of Ladislaus' blind dotage (I.iii.93); Mathias openly condemns him "For his too much indulgence to her [Honorias] humors" (IV.iv.36). Dotage helps to define the major theme of jealous virtue: Ladislaus' complete trust inverts Mathias' insecurity. Massinger grafts this plot on to the main plot by making Honorias a principal in both. She is therefore the agent of both dotage and jealous doubt: she abuses Ladislaus' firm belief in her virtue and takes advantage of Mathias' doubts of Sophia's fidelity. The satire in the dotage plot does not, therefore, consist of the simple satirical comments of Eubulus. And Honorias also demonstrates the ease with which insecure virtue may be overturned

precisely by playing on Mathias' "curious" concept of fidelity (in IV.i). We find, perhaps to our surprise, that her temptings have apparently only been a trial (IV.iii.1-3).

The problem with this sub-plot, as satire, is that Honoria is inconsistent. Earlier her motives, in soliloquy, have been stated in different terms:

I will gaine
A double victory by working him
To my desire, and tainte her in her honor
Or loose my selfe (II.ii.409-12);

and later she repents for her "ouer-weening pride" (IV.iv.88). The problem is that we do not have an omniscient virtue here to control the unvirtuous satirist, as circumscribed Luke's actions in The City Madam. In moral terms, Honoria as satirist is disturbing or at least disconcerting. But Massinger's moral conclusion is quite firm:

to all married men be this a caution
Which they should duly tender as their
life:
Neither to dote to much nor doubt a wife
(V.iii.223-25).

He avoids the ambiguity in the end in two ways, although our view of Honoria persists. First, he allows Mathias to pass Honoria's final test with flying colours. (This might seem questionable too. Mathias rejects Honoria as much because the picture of Sophia has lost its spots as because Honoria has revealed his guilt.) Honoria's real moral status therefore becomes less important because she is no longer dangerous. Second, he shifts the moral

authority and satirical function on to Sophia via the second sub-plot. The satire of Ubaldo and Ricardo involves the (literal) uncovering of their courtly vices. It is typical of the comic discovery of social vice and resembles the physical scourges found in the city comedies. Sophia's sarcastic "So hot on the scent here comes the other beagle" (IV.ii.80), and her tough punishment, to "suffer / Like the most slavish women" (IV.ii.174-75) is vigorous and funny but still moral. The diseased and bestial imagery of sex parodies the romantic concerns of love and honour; it also distorts Sophia's modesty, however, in the change from passive victim to active satirist.

The moral lessons of the dénouement, however dubious Honoria's moral status, preach trust rather than jealousy, and the absurd figures of Ubaldo and Ricardo provide a motif of Mathias' ungrounded suspicions. Massinger maintains decorum by using lower characters from the sub-plot to define the parallel education of Mathias and Ladislaus as a satirical process. Sophia is allowed to continue as a satirist, however, in order to define his guilt:

We did not deale like you in speculations
On cheating pictures; we knew shaddowes
were
No substances and actuall performance
The best assurance (V.iii.95-98).

Moral security is reinstated but it is a near thing. The dénouement takes up a revised moral configuration, making of the women ethical and satirical

signposts. By stepping up their function of demonstrating virtue and scourging vice Massinger saves his play from a dubious or ambiguous morality, but to do so he distorts Honoria into a virtuous exemplum, and makes Sophia inconsistent as both a paradigm of modesty and fidelity and a tough satirist. Our response to the repentant Honoria of Act IV is confused by her new claim as the virtuous satirical exposé of Mathias' folly, and our sympathy for Sophia as a victim of jealous love breaks down with the uncharacteristic aggression necessary to her new satirical role. It would seem, that is, that Massinger redeems his morality at the expense of an aesthetic inconsistency.

The moral (or aesthetic) ambiguity in the plays that I have been discussing is the result of a coherent dramatic structure, one that introduces satire into a romantic treatment. Massinger's two remaining plays in this group, The Maid of Honour and The Parliament of Love, present a moral dubiety as the result of an imperfect dramatic structure.

In The Maid of Honour the playwright seems to have difficulty both in the function of his satire and in the romantic treatment by itself. The play is severely moral but the romantic motifs of virtue are undigested, and Massinger throws up questionable characters which attempt to demonstrate the themes of fidelity and chastity. Camiola is presented as an exemplary figure at the end, but Massinger loses grip on his moral antitheses. While Roberto and Bertoldo are contrasted, their differences are indiscriminate, rather than

morally opposite.⁴³ Bertoldo's arguments for war,

Nor is this peace (the nurse of drones, and
cowards)
Our health, but a disease (The Maid of Honour,
I.i.188-89),

are neither less nor more persuasive than Roberto's
for peace,

Let other Monarchs
Contend to be made glorious by proud warre
(I.i.158-59).

Massinger's hypothetical characters are similarly inconsistent or unfinished on the whole, and show signs of patchwork. Roberto as a Machiavel (the change is introduced in II.i) is a red herring, Bertoldo's passions are inconsistent,⁴⁴ and Camiola's moral logic is faulty. She defends her intent to marry Bertoldo on the grounds of his new inferior status (V.ii.98-116) but this does not contradict the vow, which she reminds him about (I.ii.143-48), of chastity as a Knight of Malta.⁴⁵

There are other examples of unfinished and incoherent characterisation. Bertoldo claims a "worth [that] disdaines / Comparison" (III.i.152-53) for himself. Astutio is sketched as a Machiavel (II.i), and surprisingly as a

43. As Allen Gross points out, "Contemporary Politics in Massinger," Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900, 6 (1966), 286-87.

44. He is penitent and conceited by turns. His passionate inconstancy is, perhaps, the only dramatic consistency in the play.

45. Peter Mullany's argument that the function of the vow is simply to provide the theatrical

murderer (III.i). We find Bertoldo, complicit in the murder, attempting to blackmail Astutio, and claiming

I am [Roberto's], not fortunes martyr, and
will dye
The great example of his cruelty (III.i.197-98)

at the same time. Even Camiola's moral complexion is ugly, when she condemns the virtuous Adorni for "This more then rude presumption" (III.iii.48).

Apart from these problems in the demonstration of romantic virtue where Camiola and Bertoldo appear to be hypothetical and condescending snobs, Massinger's problems escalate in the satirical implications of his sub-plot. Bertoldo is defined by the similar but foolish pretensions to glory of the courtiers, Gaspero and Anthonio. They support his argument for war and suffer defeat with him. Signior Sylli provides a similar incidental comment on Bertoldo, whose "fond affection" (I.ii.167) is equally silly. The satiric sub-plot is funny, and strong by itself, but its application to the main plot is incoherent. Is Bertoldo supposed to be like the foolish soldiers in wanting war, is he supposed to be like Sylli? And if Gaspero and Anthonio "Feele only stings of hunger" (III.i.95) like beasts, are they more or less wise than Bertoldo

legerdemain which produces surprise and dilemma implies that the inconsistencies of the play are fundamental. Peter F. Mullany, "The Knights of Malta in Renaissance Drama," Neuphilologische Mitteilungen, 74 (1973), 309.

who blunders twice with his "law of armes"
(IV.iv.75)?⁴⁶

Massinger wrests a romantic and moral conclusion out of this material, and the surprising marriage of Camiola to the church is an interesting variation on the reversal convention of tragicomedy. But to attempt to accept the morality of this play is frustrating. The vagueness of the satirical sub-plot makes the morality shaky. And even if we accept Camiola and Bertoldo as a virtuous heroine and hero, the play remains confused, its parts failing to present a sustained pattern of romance values.

The Parliament of Love exhibits the same kind of undigested approach, but its satirical action is more deliberate. The play deals with proper and improper courtship by means of positive demonstration and negative exposure, principally in the scourging of Perigot and Novall. This is satire of the blanket-tossing kind and, as in The Picture, involves humiliation.

Again, as in The Picture, moral confirmation is to be found in the dénouement. The play is almost a five-act version of Massinger's typical dilemmas and scenes of justice in the collaborations. His problem here is that for four acts different moral claims remain at issue. The philanderers, ladies and nobles are generally typecast, but they are not simple. The trick is that Massinger does not signal the

46. First in defeat in battle, and second in neglecting his moral responsibilities on oath to Camiola.

difference between, say, Bellisant's militant chastity and Leonora's hate. This excites our moral attention but the patterns we try to arrange are always frustrated. Leonora's challenge to her lover Cleremond "To kill the best deserver" (The Parliament of Love, II.ii.154) may be satirical in intent (we cannot know until Act V) but the dilemma she introduces is specious. There should be only one response, morally speaking: to reject the challenge. Meanwhile the satire, which should be simple, is complicated. Dinant's moral status as satirist is conventional: he is a doctor curing a different kind of disease. But the extent of his exposure of Novall to sexual action -

Now since I would
 Haue the disease as priuat as the cure
 (For tis a secret), I haue wrought my
 wife
 To bee both [phisique and phisitian
 To giue you ease (IV.v.52-56)

- seems itself perverse. On top of this, the satirists tend to become so aggressively rabid as to appear vicious instead of virtuous.

Perigot and Novall are hypothetical types of lechery; their punishment is unrelieved because their lecherous impulse is absolute. But it remains unclear why Clarindor, an identical and more successful lecher, is lightly punished, and Leonora is not punished at all. The peremptory conclusion pretends to deal out moral justice, but the moral claims of the good and bad, their romantic or satiric expression and reward, is confused.

The proper concern of adverse criticism should really be the kind of problems to be found in The Maid of Honour and The Parliament of Love.

Massinger's morality in terms of satire and romance is, however, usually deliberative. It can be seen that his satiric and romantic plays display a relatively secure morality. One would hesitate to expect ambiguity in all his work, but in those plays which are ambiguous we find the satiric undercutting of romantic motifs, appropriate to the typical tragicomic reservation of certainty.

CHAPTER IV. THE FATAL DOWRY, THE DUKE OF MILAN,
 AND THE UNNATURAL COMBAT: MORAL
 ORDER IN TERMS OF GUILT AND JUSTICE

Massinger's romantic and satiric plays have their virtuous figures escape from misfortune, whatever form that escape may take. They present a fairly simple morality where virtue is rewarded and vice condemned. And they confirm "proper" social relationships in marriage and the family. His tragedies present "victims", whether innocent or guilty (or both, as with Charalois in The Fatal Dowry, for instance). They are made complex by a shifting world of moral appearances. They seem to despair of a formal application of morals to life, leaving us with only a practical morality.

What brings this change about? We have seen in Chapter III that in the romantic and satiric plays, where one might expect to find a firm moral definition, Massinger sometimes tends to a moral ambiguity. While he does not question universals quite as Shakespeare does in King Lear, Massinger's tragedies have a larger than domestic background. They are more than social, dealing with man's awareness of himself, and his place in the universe, as well as in society. The tragicomedies and comedies might be described as social blueprints, the tragedies may not. Rather, we find Massinger's interest in ambiguities in a more developed form in the wider tragic universe. His questions, paradoxes and tensions are more acute. And, because the tragedies do not start from certain moral postulates but with the mere forms of virtuous conduct, there is none of the complacent omniscience of comedy to put things right.

How do Massinger's tragedies end? Are they triumphant or despairing? This is a general question made difficult by the existence of two early collaborated tragedies, The Fatal Dowry and The Virgin Martyr, which deal with morality in specific legal and religious terms. These plays do seem to be social (in the sense of not being cosmological), they present man's place as fixed, and they do not, in consequence, seem to be tragic. What we are really interested in are the four later tragedies. The earlier two will, perhaps, be most useful as points of entry into the later ones.

I might best describe Massinger's view of tragedy by considering his work from two different vantage points. One is that tragedy is reassuring, in making man the centre of the universe, whether he gains by it or not.¹ The other is that tragedy is not reassuring (although not necessarily despairing either), by making man a meaningful part of a cosmos which is paradoxical.² Malefort,

1. The "tragic fallacy", for example, where

"Man ... lives in a world which he may not dominate, but which is always aware of him. [sic] Occupying the exact centre of a universe which would have no meaning except for him", Joseph Wood Krutch, "The Tragic Fallacy," Atlantic Monthly, 142 (1928), 608.

2. Richard B. Sewall, "The Tragic Form," Essays in Criticism, 4 (1954), 349. Man's place is meaningful, it should be pointed out, because

"out of all these tensions and paradoxes, these feelings, intuitions, insights, there emerges a fairly coherent attitude towards the universe and man ... so that tragedy arrives at affirmations, as well as denials", p. 349.

in The Unnatural Combat, is certainly at the centre of his universe. He is attacked by the state, by enemies, by friends, by the horror of incest, by his own guilt and the ghosts of his victims (imaginary or supernatural), and finally by the lightning of "heavens anger" (The Unnatural Combat, V.ii.338). There is something of the "tragic fallacy" in this unremitting extermination of evil but the tragedy, for Massinger, is hardly comforting. Malefort, like Macbeth, is a vicious man and our sympathy for him is problematic, like our sympathy for Macbeth. But the reaction of the universe to the evil at its centre is not reassuring. Malefort struggles to control the evil of incest and reaches a kind of personal triumph in sending Theocrine away but he is destroyed even for that, as Montrevile takes his revenge by bringing about her death. The play makes more sense from the second tragic point of view. There is certainly a necessity in destroy-ing Malefort but the play registers moral paradoxes in the pursuit of the man. The state may be both right and wrong in its charge of treason; Malefort Junior makes a just charge against his father, but is wrong to take revenge; and Montrevile is malicious but, disconcertingly, with some cause. Malefort finally suffers for his incestuous passion by guilt, by the horrific rape and death of Theocrine, and by his own death. The frenzied operation to cut the cancer out is successful, but there are losses to mourn in the exhausted body. Not the least is the sense of disease which permeates the play. The metaphor of cancer³ is particularly apt, as there

3. The tragic fact as an exhausting intestinal struggle, translating as "cancer" here, is of course, central to A.C. Bradley's conception of a kind of moral order in Shakespeare's tragedies.

is a suspicion in the incest motif that Malefort is as much a victim as victimiser, cursed by his progeny in a fatalistic Oresteiaen way (IV.i.7-8). This, of course, is the stuff of tragedy, with its sense that the universe destroys itself in the attempt to preserve itself. Massinger's seems to be a paradoxical and ironic tragic vision, angst, rather than a causative hybris.⁴ And it is this kind of tragedy, the tragic facing of an unknown universe, that Massinger presents.

There is a tendency in Massinger criticism and in criticism of tragedy in general, to run ahead to the best plays. I have noted this for two reasons. One, because The Fatal Dowry and The Virgin Martyr are usually treated cursorily as mere collaborations. The other, because the view that, as early tragedies, they naturally present precursory tragic paradoxes in Massinger's work should be treated with caution. The two plays present difficulties because they are not very helpful in an analysis of Massinger if taken by themselves. But neither are they of a kind with the later tragedies. Rather than treat them separately or pretend that they are heavily ironic,

See Bradley, pp. 27-29.

4. See Frye, Anatomy of Criticism, pp. 210, 213. Part of the paradox, of course, is that the hero is sometimes or in some way responsible for his downfall, as in Believe As You List.

I intend to consider the two collaborations in terms of "Renaissance" and "Roman" plays.⁵ They usefully provide points of entry, or act as sounding boards, to the moral issues developed in the later tragedies. These later tragedies present protagonists who struggle with evil either in themselves (Sforza, Malefort), or manifest in another figure (Domitian, Flaminius), and a world where evil predominates either in the powerlessness of the will to subject one's evil nature (The Duke of Milan, The Unnatural Combat) or in the entrenched bases of power which persecute goodness (The Roman Actor, Believe As You List). The regulation of justice in The Fatal Dowry collapses in The Duke of Milan and The Unnatural Combat. The sublimation of Christian virtue in The Virgin Martyr is annihilated in the Stoic suffering of the virtuous in The Roman Actor and Believe As You List. Massinger's vision of uncertainty which we discover in the tragicomedies is developed more vigorously in the tragedies. And the four later tragedies undermine whatever security the two early tragedies present.

There is a hint that this tragic vision which answers Massinger's tragicomic experience is not casual but deliberate. The Fatal Dowry and The Virgin Martyr betray several tragicomic characteristics which mitigate, or perhaps, even preclude, tragic feeling.⁶ The use of a Senecan controversia in The Fatal Dowry is typical of the hypothetical

5. By Renaissance play and Roman play I mean simply the plays set in Renaissance Europe and the Roman empire.

6. Barbara W. Paul, for instance, is critical of The Fatal Dowry exactly in the degree to which it

situation characteristic of tragicomedy.⁷ It tends to construct the moral issues of the play for our analysis. And it does not challenge but simply exercises our assumptions about justice, despite the pathos of Field's Act II, Scene i, the funeral scene, and Massinger's Act IV, Scene iv, the blinded justice scene. The Virgin Martyr makes a similar hypothetical use of religion.

It functions as a dramatic counter to build tension and to elicit responses to a series of carefully contrived scenes.⁸

P.F. Mullany suggests, further, that death by martyrdom is a victory, and the miraculous events at the end of The Virgin Martyr destroy the tragic atmosphere in a tragicomic way.⁹ Whether this is

is tragicomic: Novall Junior, for example, "is completely out of key with the tragic results of his acts". Barbara W. Paul, "Form and Formula: A Study of Philip Massinger's Tragic Structure," Diss. Pittsburgh 1969, pp. 140-41; he is, rather, a tragicomic obstacle.

7. See Eugene M. Waith, "Controversia in the English Drama: Medwall and Massinger," PMLA, 68 (1953), 286-303, esp. 298; and "The Art of Declamation," Ch. 3 in The Pattern of Tragicomedy. See also Philip Edwards' introduction to The Fatal Dowry, Oxford Massinger, I, 4.

8. Peter F. Mullany, "Religion in Massinger and Dekker's The Virgin Martyr," Komos, 2 (1969), 90.

9. Mullany, pp. 93-94.

"specious"¹⁰ or a tragic version of felix culpa as Guarini conceived it in tragicomedy¹¹ must be considered later. It should be clear, however, that the paradox characteristic of tragicomedy is exhibited here, and that insofar as the paradoxes deal with death, Massinger's attempts to vindicate moral action are serious.

The Fatal Dowry, Massinger's first tragedy, and The Duke of Milan and The Unnatural Combat, the first two of what we may call his mature tragedies,¹² share several characteristics. They form a group, firstly, as plays with a Renaissance setting distinguishing them from the other tragedies which have a Roman setting. In both cases the choice and use of setting is not incidental. The Roman plays deal with the morality of power in terms of the individual and the state, and exploit the conception of the Roman state as arbitrary and absolute. The Renaissance plays deal with the morality of revenge.

We should, however, use the term "revenge" cautiously. The Fatal Dowry seems to deal with innocence and justice in a revenge framework; The Unnatural Combat eventually imposes a divine justice but concentrates on irredeemable guilt; and Francisco's motives in The Duke of Milan are,

10. Mullany, p. 95.

11. Kirsch, Jacobean Dramatic Perspectives, p. 10.

12. The editors of the Oxford Massinger date the plays as follows:

The Fatal Dowry, ? 1617-19;
The Virgin Martyr, ? 1620;
The Duke of Milan, ? 1621-22;

like Iago's,¹³ not easily determined (at least until Act V). The plays seem to deal, rather, with the choice to take revenge (with an implicit disapproval of it), and might be better described as plays which expunge guilt, as the processes of revenge, at least of the Kydian type, are not always evident.

The Fatal Dowry ends with one of those maxims which are so commonly disappointing in Massinger:¹⁴

We are taught
By this sad president, how iust soeuer
Our reasons are to remedy our wrongs,
We are yet to leaue them to their will
and power,
That to that purpose haue authority
(The Fatal Dowry, V.ii.338-42).

Fredson Bowers accepted this interpretation of the play at its face value:

No more trenchant criticism of the revenge play was ever spoken in the theatre; and it expresses the realistic view of a law-abiding middle class.¹⁵

The Unnatural Combat, ? 1624-25;
The Roman Actor, 1626; and
Believe As You List, 1631.
(Oxford Massinger, I, Introduction, xxx-xxxi).

My discussion generally follows this order in terms of note 5, namely The Fatal Dowry followed by the earlier mature tragedies, then The Virgin Martyr and the later ones in the next chapter.

13. Bradley, Lecture VI, on Iago.

14. Disappointing, that is, if we take them at their face value.

15. Fredson Thayer Bowers, Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy, 1587-1642 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1940), p. 192.

There is, according to Massinger in Bowers's interpretation, no place for personal justice.¹⁶ We might point out, however, that the court rules in Charalois' favour:

That notwithstanding you haue gone beyond
The letter of the Law, they yet acquit
you (V.ii.324-5);

and "justice" is dealt on him by the personal (and not altogether convincing) revenge of Pontalier instead. Yet a reply in defence of Bowers could point out that Charalois reaffirms and extends the disapproval of revenge:

what's falne vpon me,
Is by Heauens will, because I made my selfe
A Iudge in my owne cause without their
warrant (V.ii.332-34).

But the argument would only point out that the play ends with a typical Massingerian suspension of possibilities. The availability of different moral statements at the end is symptomatic of the difficulties to be faced in imposing justice. The play begins with this very issue and it uses revenge as a vehicle to examine the claims for a moral order based on legal or on personal judgments of guilt and innocence. To say, then, that The Fatal Dowry is "an objective, strictly logical, and non-romantic criticism of revenge"¹⁷ is only half of it. It is also an objective, logical and non-romantic criticism of legal justice. I am not, that is, arguing that Bowers is wrong, but

16. Bowers, p. 192.

17. Bowers, p. 186.

that the pat morality at the end is only partial. The play deals with the regulation of justice, and the order which, at the end, is achieved by great struggle and expense is only an attempt to achieve moral stability. After all, Beaumelle and Novall Junior were guilty, and Charalois does exact justice of a kind. The play debates and demonstrates that some kind of working model is necessary for the practical pursuit of justice, even if we only end with a patched-up acquiescence to the decisions of the unheroic men of the play who happen to survive.

Massinger establishes a doubtful legal system at the beginning of the play.¹⁸ Romont argues, optimistically at this point,

You know not, Sir,
How in this cause they may dispence with
Law (I.i.6-7).

More critical, he soon reminds Charalois that

to gaine their fauors,
Our chastest dames put off their
modesties,
Soldiers forget their honors, vsurers
Make sacrifice of Gold, poets of wit,
And men religious, part with fame, and
goodnesse! (I.i.95-99).

The inversion of religious terms to make sacrifice to the courts, and the idea of putting away religious goodness, describe a mock-justice subject to favour and bribery.

18. The whole of the first act is Massinger's. Philip Edwards traces the division of authorship as follows:

Novall Senior most fully expresses this institutionalised system of favour (I.ii.54-56). He answers Charalois' "honest cause" (I.ii.94) by reminding his advocate of "an Act confirmed / By Parlament, to the terror of all banquerouts" (I.ii.87-88), but beneath the pretence of statutory justice Romont recognises and rails against this "corrupt Elder" (I.ii.109). Rochfort, on the other hand,

hath with such integrity,
Perform'd the first and best parts of a
Judge,
That ... his life transcends all faire
examples (I.ii.8-10),

and affirms a Stoic virtue to

Employ the small remainder of my life,
In living well, and learning how to dye
so (I.ii.40-41).¹⁹

In terms of the issue of personal justice it is clear that the integrity of Rochfort answers and condemns the statutory privilege which Novall Senior stands by. Rochfort makes use of his "boone" to free Romont (I.ii.264-288) and of his wealth to free Charalois (II.ii.253-85), in opposition to the statutory decisions of the court. And the justice which Rochfort administers here (in and out of the court) is no different from his condemnation of Beaumelle later.

I		II		III	IV		V	
i	ii	i	ii	?320	i, ii, iii, iv	i	ii	
M	Field	M	Field		M			

Oxford Massinger, I, 2.

19. B.T. Spencer points this out as a Stoic statement, p. 34.

This view of justice established in the first part of the play prepares for the dilemma Charalois faces in Act IV: "That to be mercifull should be a sinne" (IV.iv.78). The terms of mercy are only introduced at this point. In Act I Charalois did not ask for and was not given mercy:

since you are asmercillesse in your
natures,
As base, and mercenary in your meanes
By which you get your wealth, I will
not vrge
The Court to take away one scruple from
The rigor of their lawes (I.ii.197-201);

and mercy is not at issue in Charalois' rigorous judgement on Novall Junior, "To right mine honour, not for a reuenge" (IV.ii.99). Massinger also exploits the convention of the duel to signal justice in Novall Junior's folly: "How soone weak wrong's o'rthrowne!" (IV.ii.118). Even the final sitting of the court recognises

The iniuries you haue sustain'd,
[which] appeare
So worthy of the mercy of the Court
(V.ii.322-23).

Massinger only introduces mercy later to develop his examination of the grounds of justice. In order to do this he must also suspend or isolate the revenge motif associated with Charalois. (He actually shifts the revenge issue on to Pontalier, in opposition to Charalois). And in refining the action as an examination of justice he reintroduces Rochfort as the archetypal figure of justice, made explicit by the blindfolding.

Massinger's method here is typical of his tragicomedies in the layering of hypothetical possibilities. He presents several solutions to Charalois' (and Rochfort's) dilemma: we might admit

I know my fault is farre
Beyond qualification, or excuse,
That 'tis not fit for me to hope, or
you
To thinke of mercy (IV.iv.12-15),

as Beaumelle does; or suppose

when by ... proud vsage you have blowne
The fire of my iust vengeance to the
height,
I then may kill you: and yet say 'twas
done
In heate of blood, and after die my
selfe,
To witnesse my repentance (IV.iv.44-48),

as Charalois does; or decide with Rochfort that

The wrong that's done to the chaste married
bed,
Repentant teares can neuer expiate (IV.iv.136-37).

The dilemma here is that for Rochfort, the ideal judge, as much as for Charalois the claims on mercy and justice cannot be resolved. There is much point to the complication introduced by the conflicting roles of father and judge.²⁰ Rochfort's dilemma,

20. More so than in the similar scene in Robert Daborne's The Poor Man's Comfort in which, according to Lacy Lockert, there is only a perfunctory inquiry into the grounds of guilt and the function of justice. Lacy Lockert, "A Scene in The Fatal Dowry [IV.iv]," Modern Language Notes, 35 (1920), 292-93.

firstly, repeats and accents that faced by Charalois - it is not an idiosyncratic problem dependent on Charalois' particular code of nobility. And, secondly, it picks up the issue of personal justice which can be so neatly answered if defined in terms of revenge. If we can condemn Charalois for his "revenge" (and he is pardoned at the end), we cannot resolve the problem as it is stated for Rochfort. After reaching a solution Massinger allows the issue to resurface in the terms of "tyes of nature" and "loue and soft affection" (IV.iv.160, 161). While proper "justice" is the product of personal integrity, as suggested at the beginning of the play in Rochfort's ideal Stoicism, there can be no real justice to answer both the claims of punishment and mercy. Charalois forces Rochfort to pass judgement on Beaumelle but the justice is only a practical one. We are never really sure if Charalois' cause is entirely honest (IV.iv.195). More disconcerting, though, is that the attempt to arrive at justice exhausts Rochfort. The statutes that are so easily corrupted and the personal integrity that can be so dangerously exhausted leave us, then, with the insufficient legal processes of the end,²¹ and to the opposition, as it is reintroduced, of law and revenge.

21. We are also left with the issue of ingratitude but this carries over, I think, incidentally from the source controversia "Cimon ungrateful to Callias". Charalois answers the charge of ingratitude simply enough:

If to receive a fauour, make a seruant,
And benefits are bonds to tie the taker
To the imperious will of him that giues,
Ther's none but slaues will receive
courtesies,
Since they must fetter vs to our
dishonours (V.ii.190-95).

Revenge in its final form - the hot-blooded kind of Pontalier - and as the final manifestation of justice, is easily dismissed. Pontalier recognises

I receiue
The vengeance, which my loue, not built
on vertue,
Has made me worthy of (V.ii.336-38)

and Romont is banished (347). This kind of revenge is simply partisan and does not really trouble itself about justice. Charmi is able to deal with this kind of disorder, yet the order he represents seems to be a jerry-built one: Rochfort was an ideal authority to remedy wrong; and the invocation to leave justice to a possibly inadequate authority is a complacent and ironic one.

The ending of The Fatal Dowry is a disturbing one. L.G. Salinger, for example, is troubled by the failure to achieve a dramatic resolution. He suggests that this is a failure in replacing the conventions of revenge (which he accepts at face value as morally "safe") with an unconvincing code of honour.²² The disturbing quality of the play is, I think, rather the product of the exhaustion of the processes of justice. It is more worrying

The play debates justice and mercy, not the morality of ingratitude. Philip Edwards lays much greater emphasis on ingratitude. See his introduction to the play, Oxford Massinger, I, 4.

22. L.G. Salinger, "The Decline of Tragedy," in The Age of Shakespeare, ed. Boris Ford, p. 492.

because we are left with only a residual institutional code of justice, not even a code of honour. The proportions of the play as a whole are not tragic, but the sense of exhaustion that expresses order merely by the lack of forces to oppose it is one familiar in Shakespearean tragedy²³ and is characteristic, as I noted earlier,²⁴ of Massinger's mature tragedies. What is particularly uncomfortable about the ending is that the struggle to maintain virtue which is usually reassuring is allowed to fail. The pale regulation of justice as it survives in The Fatal Dowry is, however, subjected to an unrelenting scale of evil in Massinger's other tragedies of guilt, The Duke of Milan and The Unnatural Combat.

The Duke of Milan presents difficulties for discussion as it relies for its effect on new information delayed by the action of the first four acts until Francisco's revenge motive is revealed in the last act; and because its consistent thematic concern with the "disjunction between appearance and reality"²⁵ is so open to misinterpretation if taken at face value. Typically, the play is seen as a poor relation to Othello, to which it is obviously indebted,²⁶ and remarkable for its ignoble characters. As M.J. Thorssen argues, however, on this point Massinger takes pains to create

23. It calls Macbeth especially to mind.

24. p. 108.

25. M.J. Thorssen, p. 315.

26. See Frost, pp. 112-15; Marinoff, p. 77; Thorssen, p. 313. See also Colin Gibson's introduction to the play in the Oxford Massinger, I, 202.

a world in which no character is truly noble or honest, a world in which love is "merely a lust of the blood" (Othello, I.iii.335) and honor only an illusion, a world in which corruption of language and moral weakness reinforce each other.²⁷

Where, moreover, deceit and deception foster a generic tendency to doubt, in which there is a suspicion that even Marcelia's "sorrow's trewe, / Or deeply counterfeited" (The Duke of Milan, II.i.34-35). This world is consistently deceptive, trapping its victims with a "verbal hypocrisy"²⁸ that obscures virtue and disguises ugly and vicious characteristics with an elegant and courtly language and morality, as Sforza exhibits in his embassy to the emperor and as Francisco does so brutally in painting-up the poisoned figure of the dead Marcelia. We are meant, that is, to see Sforza put-on the role of modest ruler, a role clearly at odds with the sensuous and appetitive imagery of lust which characterises him in Act I.²⁹

The embassy scene

Is essential for revealing Sforza's ability to use language rhetorically, though hypocritically, to gain favor ... His success in persuading the Emperor of his honorable motives indicates [the effectiveness of] ... verbal hypocrisy.³⁰

27. Thorssen, p. 314. Henry Wells, however, argues that Sforza and Marcelia are generally admirable characters. Henry W. Wells, Elizabethan and Jacobean Playwrights (1939; New York: Kennikat Press, 1964), pp. 67-68.

28. Thorssen, p. 319.

29. See Lyons, pp. 47-48.

30. Thorssen, p. 319.

Francisco is, of course, the one

character in the play who is thoroughly aware of the discrepancy between word and feeling³¹

and, like Iago, he manipulates Sforza and Marcelia (as well as Isabella and Mariana), so that they misjudge each other's words and actions. Massinger develops this theme further in Act V in his reworking of the final scene of The Second Maiden's Tragedy.³² Here Francisco performs a visual tableau of the verbal distortions of appearance and reality current throughout the play. The potentially melodramatic scene³³ has a significance which is absent in the purely sensational treatment of his source.³⁴ Massinger spares nothing in portraying the final corruption of Sforza's misperception. The matter-of-fact reminder that

The body to[o], will putrifie, and then
We can no longer cover the imposture
(V.ii.135-36),

and Francisco's grim satire on court ladies as he paints the corpse with poison (V.ii.183-96), are grotesque. Francisco's revenge is, like Iago's, refined and elaborate, but it extends deception

31. Thorssen, p. 321.

32. See Colin Gibson, Oxford Massinger, I, 202.

33. Frost, p. 115.

34. The Second Maiden's Tragedy in the Malone Society Reprints Series (Oxford: Oxford University Press, nd).

to a more horrible and grimly humorous justice. (By humour I mean a sardonic, if bizarre, appropriateness in the revenge Francisco takes for the appetitive and sensual guilt of Sforza.)

Sforza is clearly unlike Othello in that he is as much deceiver as deceived. Similarly, Francisco seems different from Iago. As David Frost points out,

he lacks that diabolic delight in senseless mischief that makes Iago so terrifying

and he "degenerates" into a revenger.³⁵ But even Iago is, as A.C. Bradley insisted, motivated in some way by his contemptful and unrewarded sense of superiority.³⁶ Thorssen lays his finger on the real difference when he suggests

Francisco is a villain less diabolically evil than Iago not merely because Massinger motivates his malignancy, but because Massinger distributes Iago's functions and values among most of the characters in his play.³⁷

Moreover, the play makes explicit parallels between the different actors in these generic processes of deception: Sforza, for example,

In his shrewd appeal first to the Emperor's nobler side and then to his more practical side, ... repeats the rhetorical strategy that Francisco had used on Marcelia.³⁸

35. Frost, pp. 114-115.

36. Bradley, pp. 184-87.

37. Thorssen, pp. 313-14; emphasis added. Marinoff also makes the point, p. 87.

38. Marinoff, p. 91.

Massinger suggests a sense of evil as a chronic disease, a despairing condition of guilt that goes beyond the residual order which ends The Fatal Dowry. Morally speaking, The Duke of Milan is more uncertain than Othello in presenting a tragic angst in which guilt is an unremitting condition. I.B. Marinoff goes even further:

The Duke of Milan has a mythic or archetypal dimension largely because we recognise that the tragic end of the Duke's obsessive love for Marcelia was a possibility that had always hung over them.³⁹

There is a thorough moral dilemma similar to Othello's in that Francisco is, like Iago, merely a catalyst in the collapse of virtue.

Unlike Desdemona, Marcelia participates in deception. In doing so she makes herself guilty in appearance, and, because appearance and reality are so confused, guilty in fact as well. Her guilt as a fact functions in two ways. Her suggestive remark, that

I stand indebted to your substitute,
Noble and good Francisco for his care,
And faire obseruance of me: There was
nothing
With which you being present could
supply me,
That I dare say I wanted ...
The pleasures
That sacred Hymen warrants vs excepted
(III.iii.121-26),

bears its full weight on the listening court. It is as much as an admission of guilt and, coming in

39. Marinoff, p. 96

the middle of the play, initiates the process of Sforza's jealousy. It is into the world of uncertain morality established in the first half of the play in the hypocritical rhetoric of Francisco and Sforza that Marcelia knowingly enters, and it is only now that she becomes vulnerable. She becomes guilty in the eyes of the court who draw the appropriate conclusion from her innuendo, and guilty by the same process in consciously deciding that there is "something I may doe to try his [Sforza's] temper" (III.iii.78). It is something Desdemona never does.

The Duke of Milan does not present a simple morality. The play as a whole is not about the proper justice dealt on Sforza for his lust, as Pescara claims: that

ther's no trust
In a foundation that is built on lust
(V.ii.268-69).

Up until the disclosure in Act V of Sforza's ill-treatment of Eugenia, his moral status remains in doubt. Sforza and Marcelia seem to be more inexperienced than guilty and the tragic results of their mistakes seem incomprehensible. The matter of the proportion of the tragic catastrophe to the fault of the protagonist is, of course, a central problem in the criticism of tragedy, and it is not likely to be settled in a discussion of Massinger, because his interest is with the very doubtfulness of the moral claims to the reward of virtue. While The Unnatural Combat has its malefactor finally struck down by lightning (and this

by no means guarantees a moral security at the end of that play), Massinger leaps the problems of Sforza and Marcelia's particular guilt in The Duke of Milan by introducing the machinery of revenge.

This does some violence to the action of the play, and particularly to the character of Francisco, as has been well noted,⁴⁰ but Massinger is not primarily concerned to motivate Francisco as a revenger. Rather, he establishes a discrete guilt, Sforza's violence to Eugenia, and appropriate grounds for justice. But by making the process of justice the performance of Francisco's revenge he maintains the ground-swell of diseased guilt that permeates the play while at the same time maintaining the sense of appropriate justice.

We return, then, to the issue of The Fatal Dowry, but the guilt of the revenger, the success of his grotesque cruelty, and the justice of his revenge question the moral order more fundamentally. The way in which Massinger creates this moral complexity is quite similar to his treatment of faulty virtue and the process of re-education in The Picture. There, he collapsed several functions into the one character as the satirical agent of moral instruction, in that case putting virtue in some degree of doubt.⁴¹ Here, he assigns different moral qualities to Francisco as revenger, creating a nexus of moral interpretations which allow any or all of the

40. For instance, D.L. Frost, on the change of direction in Act V, p. 114; Bradbrook, Themes and Conventions, pp. 37, 243; and Dunn, p. 68. Barbara Paul, on Francisco, argues that Massinger simply combines two conventional types (which do not dovetail) to echo Sforza, pp. 169, 176.

41. See Chapter III, pp. 96-98.

protagonists to be guilty without entirely expunging guilt by a clear process of justice.⁴²

We cannot explain The Duke of Milan as simply the realisation of a

tragic potential ... when an inconsistency becomes apparent between a man's public and private selves.⁴³

It is exactly the inextricable nature of delusion, the collapse of appearance with reality, which diseases reality. Nor is "the revenge of Francisco the moving cause of the action".⁴⁴ What preserves the diseased guilt of Milan at the same time as Francisco destroys the guilty is the sense of revenge as merely a catalyst. The tragic angst in Massinger's version is even more self-destroying than Shakespeare's.

What, then, is left at the end? Is there a new transcendent morality which replaces the vacuum created by the catastrophe; or merely moral remnants which survive the internecine tragic struggle? The moral statements that the play ends with are defined by the revenge motif, but unlike the disapproval of revenge, in The Fatal Dowry, Pescara makes no explicit condemnation here. In fact, he implies that Sforza has received justice. While we cannot

42. Marcelia's guilt and punishment are, however, qualified by Eugenia's compassion (V.i.32-50; V.ii.197-99).

43. Paul, p. 163.

44. Bowers, p. 193.

disagree, the moral order that Pescara claims is not made, by implication, triumphant, and the revenge motif seems to cast a sickly shadow over it. Perhaps a comparison with the ending of Othello might be helpful.

In his theory of the disapproval of revenge in the drama, around the 1620s and 30s, Fredson Bowers suggests that

when the villain reigns supreme, revenge still plays an important part in the structure of the plot, but the interest is frequently shifted from the workings of this revenge to the general villainy of action.⁴⁵

Once Iago has finished explaining the motives of his villainy,⁴⁶ however insufficient we may think them to be, he swings into his energetic and elaborate intrigues and we forget the motive, at least while the action is happening. We are concerned more with the success of his "general villainy", and with the ability of Desdemona and later Othello to transcend his malignity. The Duke of Milan does the reverse. It goes from "general villainy" to its motivation and therefore ends with the question of revenge when, in Othello, it is nowhere in sight.

Othello attains a moral status above the animalistic version of sexuality which Iago temporarily succeeds in imposing upon him. He realises that he is "one that loved not wisely, but too well" (Othello, V.ii.340) and reaffirms his love in death:

45. Bowers, p. 185.

46. Bradley, p. 184.

I kissed thee ere I killed thee. No way but
 this,
 Killing myself, to die upon a kiss
 (V.ii.354-55).

This recalls the murder scene and signals a kind of justice, but Othello's terms in his final speech (V.ii.334-52) go beyond justice, and it is left to Lodovico to demand revenge:

If there be any cunning cruelty
 That can torment him [Iago] much and hold
 him long,
 It shall be his (V.ii.329-31).

In contrast, Francisco's revenge only calls forth more of the same from Sforza, who is

Like one,
 That learns to know in death what punishment,
 Waits on the breach of faith. O now I feele
 An AEtna in my entrailes!⁴⁷ I haue liu'd
 A Prince, and my last breath shal be commaund.
 I burne, I burne, yet ere life be consum'd
Let me pronounce vpon this wretch all torture
 That witty cruelty can inuent
 (The Duke of Milan, V.ii.243-50).

Unlike Othello Sforza remains degraded. He does not learn to accommodate passion with reason, and he uses revengeful hatred as a filter. It is for Pescara and the other survivors to "learne from this example" (V.ii.268) and they end the play with a fragile, cautious and, I think, inadequate moral understanding that:

47. This is the effect of Francisco's poison but it also suggests the burning hatred to revenge himself which follows.

ther's no trust
 In a foundation that is built on lust
 (V.ii.268-69).

While this is relevant to Sforza's fall, it fails to recognise or answer the tragic angst of the play. That is, it cannot resolve the burden of guilt, it can neither confirm nor deny the virtue of the protagonists, and it fails to secure justice when the agent of justice shares the guilt of its corrupt world.

The Unnatural Combat, written two or three years later, shares the same preoccupation with crime and guilt, but presents a more thoroughgoing analysis of the ambiguities (and failure) of revenge as a moral agent. The play is linear and more straightforward than The Duke of Milan in pitting a series of moral antagonists against a central malefactor.

Critical attention to The Unnatural Combat has focused primarily on its problematic plot structure. For example, J. de Vos thinks that

there is a complete lack of unity in the action. From the third act onwards, attention is given to entirely new events that have nothing to do with those of Acts I and II. There is ... no connection between "the unnatural combat" that takes place at the end of Act II and Malefort's passion for his daughter.⁴⁸

W.J. Courthope argues:

Though it be granted that Malefort's various punishments are the just retribution of his

48. De Vos, "Philip Massinger and Dramatic Construction," 71.

vicious selfishness, it cannot be considered that the mechanical explanation of them, furnished at the end of the play, is sufficient to weld into unity actions so apparently disconnected.⁴⁹

The problem is of a kind with the shift which occurs in The Duke of Milan. Interestingly, it gives point to the issue of revenge here, as it does in that play. Fredson Bowers notes,

To all intents, revenge is of quite subordinate interest in the play, since there is no indication until the last act that any revengeful action has been on foot.⁵⁰

In fact, he suggests, the elaborate withholding of information about antecedent action is decadent, and serves only for mystery.⁵¹

These criticisms point to what seems to be an experimental new plot structure. Barbara Paul convincingly argues that this structure can best be seen as a double movement of rise and fall:

Malefort's good fortune is directly opposed by a succession of antagonistic forces: first, and most immediate, the city of Marseilles, personified in the figure of Beaufort Senior. Simultaneously, but less immediately, he is opposed by his own son. After this action is completed, Malefort's worst enemy is his own evil passion. At the last he is again

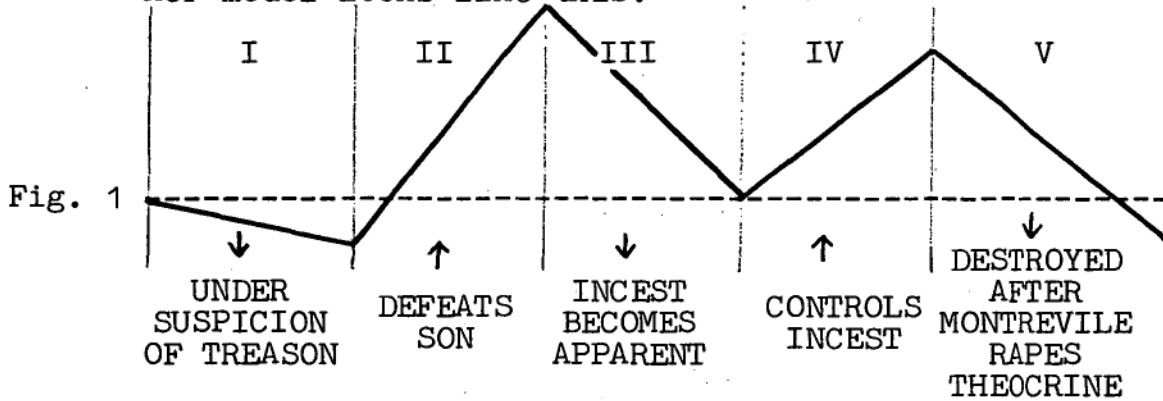
49. W.J. Courthope, A History of English Poetry, IV (London: Macmillan, 1895-1910; rpt. New York: Russell and Russell, 1962), 354.

50. Bowers, p. 196.

51. Bowers, p. 195.

opposed by external forces, Montrevile and the supernatural.⁵²

Her model looks like this:⁵³



This structure allows Massinger to do two things. Firstly he is able to protract the serial and linear process of conflict to describe a world in which all things are subjected to the unnatural. From the very beginning, when Montrevile counsels Theocrine to seduce Beaufort Junior in order to save her father, and where one deceives oneself

By building too much on the false foundations
Of chastity and vertue (The Unnatural Combat,
I.i.45-46),

52. Paul, p. 75. In my comments on structure I am much indebted to her discussion of The Unnatural Combat.

53. There is also the sub-plot which follows the fortunes of Belgarde, but this primarily serves as a commentary, pointing up differences with Malefort, most obviously in that, while his fortunes ebb and flow like Malefort's, he ends the play in good fortune and with his virtue vindicated. See Geraint Lloyd Evans, "The Unnatural Combat," Notes and Queries, NS 5 (1958), 96, and Paul, p. 104.

there is a warping of values that proves to be endemic. Malefort's "unnatural combat", whatever its source, also collapses basic values.⁵⁴ Secondly, it

accommodate[s] the gradual peeling away of [Malefort's] more admirable traits to allow him to stand, totally evil, to receive his judgement.⁵⁵

The balance of this serial structure, allowing success and failure without any marked moral dominance by Malefort's opposition, provides a pattern for his internal moral struggle, which becomes increasingly explicit as the play progresses. The product of these two tendencies is that while the process peels the heroic off Malefort, his endurance of a battery of opposition makes him a tragic figure.⁵⁶ And the pathological nature of the moral struggle with his actual antagonists produces a sense of the necessity of his inner struggle with passion and guilt.

The charge of treason against Malefort seems to be answered by the challenge of his son -

Stand I yet suspected
As a confederate with this enemy ...?
(I.i.378-79)

- but the crime and accusation have simply been replaced. Similarly, unnatural hatred for his son is replaced by unnatural lust for his daughter, and

54. Marinoff makes this point in her discussion of the play, pp. 3, 4.

55. Paul, p. 96.

56. Paul, p. 85. Even Dunn finds his conflict interesting and acknowledges that he is a sympathetic hero, pp. 127, 128.

the remarkable passion produces the same doubts concerning Malefort's integrity (by Beaufort Senior in I.i, and by nearly everyone in III.iii). In the same way, Malefort is subjected to a series of suspicions concerning Theocrine, and his torment when Beaufort Junior woos her in private is repeated in Montrevile's malicious rape. The antagonistic role forced on Malefort by this process gradually exposes his guilt as his defences weaken. This exposure also follows a pattern which moves from the impersonal opposition of Malefort Junior, to the internal struggle of Malefort with his own incestuous lust.⁵⁷ The formidable figure who manages to disguise his guilt by defeating his son at the beginning is finally exposed by Montrevile at the end.

The function of Montrevile here is similar to that of Francisco in The Duke of Milan.⁵⁸ In terms of revenge, he deals justice on Malefort for a pathological guilt. But, unlike Sforza, Malefort attempts to come to terms with his passion, and Montrevile's violent revenge in raping Theocrine is, in the extent to which Malefort is successful in expiating his guilt⁵⁹ and in the degree of Theocrine's

57. See Paul, p. 83.

58. And like Francisco his motives are similarly withheld until late in the play, perhaps, as Paul argues

"to keep him from becoming too significant a figure. He is not, after all, the antagonist in the play, but simply one of a string of opposing forces."
Paul, p. 82. Her emphasis.

59. Paul argues that his

"decision to give up Theocrine is a moral victory ... although a practical mistake."
Paul, p. 100.

innocence, an injustice. Massinger sets his discussion of a pathologically guilty society and a guilty soul in terms of justice. And his conclusions on the moral ambiguity of justice can be found in the reservations maintained for and against the moral claims of the father and son in the first part of the play, and of father and daughter in the second.

The two movements of the play largely correspond to two declamations. One describes a general's son who flees to the enemy, challenges his father and is killed in battle, after the father refuses to accept the challenge to single combat. The other involves an incestuous passion in which the friend (apparently benevolently) refuses to return the daughter placed in his care to the father.⁶⁰ The formal debate which this kind of source implies underscores the controversial nature of Massinger's discussion.⁶¹

This is reflected, for example, in the critical debate on the vindication of Malefort Senior in the first plot. B.T. Spencer argues that

60. Declamations cccxvii and ccxxxix. Colin Gibson, introduction to The Unnatural Combat, Oxford Massinger, II, 185-86. Gibson notes other borrowings from the Declamations attributed to Quintilian, but these are incidental.

61. See Eugene Waith, "The Art of Declamation," Ch. 3 in The Pattern of Tragicomedy.

in the many instances where Massinger employs the single combat as a dramatic device for deciding the truth or error of a matter in dispute, the rightful cause is always victorious.⁶²

For Malefort Senior, as well as the others, the combat is, according to Spencer, a vindication:

yet thou being my sonne,
Were't not a competent judge mark'd out by
heaven
For her revenger, which thy falling by
My weaker hand confirm'd. Tis granted
by thee (V.ii.294-97).⁶³

Barbara Paul disagrees:

Malefort Junior and Senior are both wrong;
the stroke of lightning that kills Malefort
Senior at the end of the play is equivalent
to the stroke of the sword that kills the
son in Act II.⁶⁴

Massinger explores the complex moral claims to justice in this dilemma. Malefort Junior fails to expiate the guilt of his family because the attempt to exact justice is itself a crime:

I can nor live, nor end a wretched life,
But both wayes I am impious (II.i.58-59).

The logical moral to draw from this would be to say that the son is wrong, except that Massinger has Malefort Senior claim a kind of a moral

62. Spencer, p. 27. This is true in The Fatal Dowry, but there Massinger makes the rightful cause explicit.

63. Spencer, p. 27.

64. Paul, in a note on pp. 112-13.

freedom under the protection of filial obligation:

Since though my deeds wore Hells blacke liverie,
To thee they should appear triumphall robes,
Set off with glorious honour, thou being bound
To see with my eyes, and to hold that reason,
That takes or birth or fashion from my will
(II.i.160-64).

We cannot resolve this issue, as Spencer does, by reference to the moral vindication of Malefort Senior implicit in the defeat of his son. Massinger circumvents this convention by redefining the terms. It is not a natural justice but the fact

That I have power to be unnaturall [which]
Is my securitie (II.i.208-09).

The confidence that Malefort Senior expresses here, that he is above Fate, is the moral signal in this issue. It surely points to the irony in Beaufort Junior's hope that

the conqueror that survives
Must reape the harvest of his bloody labour
(II.i.264-65).

By Act V he seems to be brought to justice by his guilt, confessing (rather woodenly)

The cause (which to the world is undiscover'd)
That forc'd thee to shake off thy filiall duty
(V.ii.288-89).

But the bolt of lightning from Heaven does not solve, it simply suspends, the issue. It takes the contention that revenge be left to God to its logical

conclusion⁶⁵ and we might feel quite secure that

There cannot be a want of power above
To punish murther, and unlawfull love
(V.ii.342-43),

except that Malefort Junior's moral action is still ambiguous. The play seems to suggest more radically than The Fatal Dowry or The Duke of Milan that the complex claims of guilt make the attempt to seek justice by men impossible.

That Massinger does not simply develop a dilemma until he finds it impossible to solve but is seriously concerned with the problem of revenge can be seen in his approach to the problem in the different terms of the second revenge plot. Fredson Bowers points out that for Malefort to be punished by Montrevile would present too obscure a moral,⁶⁶ but this is exactly what happens. Montrevile's revenge on Malefort by means of the rape of Theocrine is an appropriate retribution, as it prevents Malefort from enjoying her even though she was the object of his passion too. But the issue is precisely one of justice, for it is Montrevile who collapses the usually exclusive terms of justice and corruption at the very beginning:

If by our owne forc'd importunity,
Or others purchasd intercession, or
Corrupting bribes we can make our approches
To justice, guarded from us by sterne power,
We blesse the meanes, and industry (I.i.8-12).

65. Bowers, p. 197.

66. Bowers, p. 198.

And he successfully disputes that a competent judge is marked out by Heaven. Malefort Junior's revenge is denied but Montrevile succeeds and Heaven, perhaps, intervenes too late.

Montrevile punishes Malefort for his incestuous passion rather than for mere breach of contract. That is, he is placed in the position of a moral arbiter. Massinger has the guilty condemn the guilty in much the same way as Francisco does in The Duke of Milan, suggesting justice of a very dubious kind. This unresolvable sense of guilt and suffering in the play calls Aeschylus's Oresteia to mind. Malefort's guilt is pervasive and draws vulnerable innocence into suffering with him, but there is no formal resolution of crime here as there is in the Eumenides. We are left, pessimistically,⁶⁷ with Montrevile. The retribution he exacts is necessary, for Malefort's incestuous passion would make

natures selfe run backward,
And done, had caus'd an earth-quake
(V.ii.251-52),

but his judgement, like Malefort Junior's, supercedes divine authority.

67. This view of the pessimism of the play is shared by Barbara Paul, pp. 119-20. It depends on whether we are able to make the imaginative leap to believe in the lightning bolt. It is not, I think, very convincing and has its own problems of theatricalism. Colin Gibson, in his introduction to the play, refers to a bemused report in The Times which deserves repeating:

In the face of this moral problem, a concrete and active example of divine justice in the form of the lightning bolt is, if not necessary,⁶⁸ at least comforting. All three of the plays discussed in this chapter finally return to a tacit acceptance of the residual order that survives the tragic conflict, but the dramatic emphasis seems surely to be on the problems which must be recognised before we can do that..

"the lightning which should have killed Malefort, fell out of time and place and struck a post, and when it should have fallen, it appeared the scenic Jove had not another bolt left, so that Malefort fell and died quietly without any visible cause."

Oxford Massinger, II, 194.

68. Bowers suggests that it is, p. 198.

CHAPTER V. THE VIRGIN MARTYR, THE ROMAN ACTOR, AND
BELIEVE AS YOU LIST: THE CONFLICT OF
INDIVIDUAL AND STATE

The Fatal Dowry, The Duke of Milan and The Unnatural Combat question the integrity of justice necessary to the reordering of a guilty society. They all question or test in some degree the idea that there is a moral order. While Massinger does not go to a nihilist extreme in these plays, he seems concerned to challenge our complacency about a morally secure and benevolently governed universe. In his Roman plays Massinger takes our moral doubts further. These plays seem to form a coherent group in which the innocent suffer injustice, in a reworking of the guilt and justice model of the Renaissance plays.

The Roman plays as a group, however, display a greater range of moral positions than the Renaissance plays which raised the same issues and required the same responses, particularly in regard to the guilty revenger. In the Roman plays all the persecutors are similarly nasty, but their effect is various. In The Virgin Martyr Dorothea transcends her persecutors and fixes a sublime Christian morality over the action. The moral status of the emperor and his assassins in The Roman Actor is mixed -

[Domitian] was our Prince
How euer wicked, and in you 'tis murther
(The Roman Actor, V.ii.77-78)

- and raises moral problems of a typical political kind. Antiochus in Believe As You List is, at the other extreme to Dorothea, completely ground down and the personal kind of political integrity that he stands for is annihilated by the demands of

"necessitie of state" (Believe As You List, II.i.126). Antiochus does achieve a moral triumph of a personal kind, but this play and the Roman plays as a whole define their moral issues in political terms. Dorothea's victory, for example, is partly expressed as the simple glory of martyrdom but the movement of the play follows the growth of her subversion of the pagan state, ending with the conversion of Theophilus and the freeing of the Christian slaves. She transcends her persecutors not only by welcoming torture and death but by subverting the power and the will of the state.

In terms of Massinger's tragic vision outlined at the beginning of Chapter IV, the Roman plays as a group take the sense of a tragic angst to a further extreme. While Dorothea welcomes and transcends her persecution the portrait of necessary suffering is appalling, more so as the power and success of an immoral or amoral state seems to grow in The Roman Actor and Believe As You List at the expense of the individual's claim to moral security. Massinger seems to establish a moral pattern in which the individual does withstand the attack of the state in the early play only to question and then undermine that vindication in the later plays.

The Virgin Martyr attracts critical attention precisely in terms of this vindication. Dorothea is too morally fixed and suggests too secure a guarantee of future happiness to be properly tragic, as Louise George Clubb points out:

The character of Dorothea is conceived as a spiritual triumph already completed, beyond doubt or conflict.¹

Critics also focus their attention on the dramatic problems which Dekker and Massinger create in attempting to ring changes on such a fixed moral figure and theme:

The basic problem of making a martyr's life not only instructive but dramatically effective is that the fortitude to be admired must be shown by the victim's calm endurance, while the villains occupy most of the audience's attention with their nefarious activities.²

Most critics probably have Hircius and Spungius in mind,³ rather than Theophilus.

Both criticisms seem to point to the formal problem we face in regarding The Virgin Martyr as a tragedy. Barbara Paul, for example, argues that

1. Clubb, "The Virgin Martyr and the Tragedia Sacra," 105.

2. Eugene M. Waith, Ideas of Greatness: Heroic Drama in England (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971), p. 165.

3. They are possibly Massinger's contribution to the play according to W.A. Ova, "Dekker and The Virgin Martyr," English Studies, 3 (1921), 167-68, although Fredson Bowers confidently attributes them to Dekker in his edition of the play. See the introduction to The Virgin Martyr in The Dramatic Works of Thomas Dekker, ed. Fredson Bowers, III (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958), 372. I have used this edition for all line references which follow. On the subject of collaboration, Bowers seems tentatively to accept Gifford's assignment of scenes between the two dramatists, preferring to give IV.i to Dekker, as follows:

Dorothea's posthumous triumph is so absolute that it negates any element of 'tragedy' in her martyrdom.⁴

The most obvious answer is that it is not a tragedy at all, but a morality play, or a play borrowing much from the morality tradition.⁵ If we test Dorothea's martyrdom as a tragic experience we find no peripeteia characteristic of tragedy but a super-imposed Christian view which would seem to have defined her spiritual victory before the play has begun, as in her automatic desire for martyrdom, for instance:

you loose ten times more
By torturing me, than I that dare your tortures,
The sight of whips, rackes, gibbets, axes, fires
Are scaffoldings, by which my soule climbs vp
To an Eternall habitation (The Virgin Martyr,
II.iii.162-69).

We do not see Dorothea achieve this understanding, nor is it challenged.

Herbert Weisinger suggests that poetic justice of the kind found here is necessarily absent from

I	II	III	IV	V
i	ii	iii	i, ii, iii	i, ii
M	D	M	D	M

pp. 369, 372.

4. Barbara Paul, "Form and Formula," p. 144.

5. See, for example, Mullany, "Religion in Massinger and Dekker's The Virgin Martyr," 90, and Paul, p. 145. Clubb suggests it is a tragedia sacra not a morality play, pp. 103, 107-8.

tragedy. He argues that certainty or the articulation of certain morals precludes tragic experience.⁶ And

tragedy can exist only when the issue is left in doubt, when the conflict of forces is left free to play itself out, when the audience can be trusted to understand what is at stake; contrariwise, in an art form which is dominated by the concept of poetic justice, truth cannot be allowed freely to emerge from the clash of opposing forces, but is imposed on the process from the outside, so that what does finally appear is necessarily emasculated, narrowly defined, and partisan.⁷

If we apply this to Dorothea in The Virgin Martyr, as I assume we all would, then the play is not tragic at all. But this seems to sell the play far short of the complexities it involves. It might make better sense of the play to argue that although Dorothea is central to the play she functions properly as a kind of moral register, similar to Pulcheria in The Emperor of the East, rather than as the protagonist. We have to look to Theophilus and perhaps Antoninus⁸ for a tragic change - one which registers as morally positive by their final identification with Dorothea. It is Theophilus, after all, who functions as the formal protagonist, opening and ending the action of the play.⁹

6. Weisinger, Tragedy and the Paradox of the Fortunate Fall, Ch. 7.

7. Weisinger, p. 246.

8. Clubb, p. 105.

9. As Clubb notes, p. 105. Theophilus not only begins and ends the play, but Dorothea is absent at the beginning and the end. See Paul, p. 132.

If we do take Theophilus as the protagonist then Weisinger's definition makes available a tragic interpretation. And Massinger signals his concern with the tragic potential of the exercise of morality by the state in putting Theophilus up against Dorothea. The play may lose something of a tragic sense because Dorothea is morally invincible as an opponent, but the final horror that Theophilus recognises as a representative of the state and his transcendence as a moral and Christian being at the end fits Weisinger's definition. That is, the play does put the claims of the state and the individual, as well as the pagan and the Christian, in doubt. And it uses Dorothea's unequivocal moral status as a signal.

If The Virgin Martyr was meant simply to vindicate Dorothea, then we are faced with several unaccountable inconsistencies. Dioclesian, for example, the representative of the state, is portrayed as noble and merciful rather than wicked. He considers that

cruelty is vseful ...
 ... but when a state
 Is raysde to her perfection, and her Bases
 Too firme, to shrink, or yeelde, we may
 vse mercy
 ... I with courtesie can vse my prisoners
 ... for such is
 The power of noble valour, that we loue it
 Eu'n in our enemies (I.i.236-57).

Similarly, the Christian victory is undercut - the status quo at the end remains unchanged despite Dorothea's martyrdom and her conversion of Theophilus:

I thinke the centre of the earth be crackt,
 Yet I still stand vnmo'd, and will go on,
 The persecution that is here begun,
 Through all the world with violence shall
 run (V.ii.239-42).

These apparent problems are in fact the expression of the tension between the perception of the individual and his action as an organ of the state. If Harpax, Hircius and Spungius define Theophilus' persecution of Christians as malicious, Dioclesian defines it as politically "useful". And Theophilus is not always malicious. The conflict of Christian and pagan in fact raises for him the issue how far the state may abrogate individual rights.

The issue compares with that of revenge in The Fatal Dowry, except that here the terms of justice are Christian and supersede the claims of the state. Massinger sets the opposition up by a brief and explicit echo of Rochfort in the blinded-justice scene. Here, Theophilus remembers

I put on
 The scarlet robe of bold authority
 ... as they [his miscreant daughters] had bin
 strangers to my blood.

but must
 Confesse there was a strange contention in me,
 Betweene the impartiall office of a Iudge,
 And pittie of a father (I.i.172-74, 179-82).

The tension between the individual and the state is underlined by the casual repetition of an opposition between Christian and pagan. The individual and the Christian are not linked by necessity or

definition;¹⁰ but the Roman setting does make the state pagan (or "gentile", I.i.30) and this carries over to turn the tension between the individual and the state into an opposition. The elision of the terms makes the conflict of forces apparent and it also collapses the Christian and the individual into one moral signal, so that the conversion of Theophilus and Antoninus is also a victory for individualism against the state.

This structure may find support in the interesting suggestion that the original of the play may have been called "Dioclesian" or "Dorothea"¹¹, emphasising this semi-allegorical structure where Dorothea is not the subject of the moral struggle¹² but one of the reference points in the conflict. The terms of this opposition between the Roman state and the Christian individual provide a setting within which Theophilus and, to some extent, Antoninus identify their moral position in relation to the two camps.

This process is mapped out emblematically rather than psychologically or as a process of character. For instance, it is not Theophilus or even Antoninus who condemns the suggested rape of Dorothea so energetically -

10. And it is perhaps this casual use of religion which lays The Virgin Martyr open to Peter Mullany's charge that

"Religion gives an apparent seriousness to a dramatic action structured to exploit its materials in the manner of Fletcherian tragedy rather than to use them for the shaping of a meaningful statement about life." Mullany, p. 90.

11. According to F.G. Fleay, as Ova notes, p. 167.

12. Mullany suggests she should be, p. 95.

is this your manly seruice,
 A Divell scornes to doo't, tis for a beast.
 A villaine, not a man, I am as yet
 But halfe a slaue, but when that worke is
 past,
 A damned whole one, a blacke vgly slaue,
 The slaue of all base slaues, doo't thy
 selfe Roman,
 Tis drudgery fit for thee (IV.i.150-56).¹³

- but a slave introduced simply to provide a definition of the inner nobility of man. The slave refuses to act as the instrument of the state, and asserts his individual free will in the choice of refusal. His moral freedom contrasts with the Roman conformity to the state: "Thou art more slaue than I" (IV.i.160). Within the scheme of moral signals so established Theophilus and Antoninus act morally simply by moving from one camp to another.

Barbara Paul outlines something like this structure in "Form and Formula: A Study of Philip Massinger's Tragic Structure." Massinger's tragedies, she argues, chart the conflict of two antagonists in contest over a third figure, where the primary antagonist loses to the secondary antagonist. There is a corresponding re-alignment of minor figures with the secondary protagonist.¹⁴ She defines this, further, as a conflict between two men over a woman,

13. Bowers assigns IV.i to Dekker (see note 3), but the slaves' refusal seems characteristic of Massinger's conception of Stoic virtue. See Spencer, p. 86.

14. Paul, pp. 13-16. The germ of her model is evident in Bradley's tragic theory, Shakespearean Tragedy, pp. 10-11. Northrop Frye's arguments are similar, in Anatomy of Criticism, p. 209.

coming unstuck in applying her model to Believe As You List,¹⁵ and in failing to recognise the structure in The Virgin Martyr.¹⁶ The structure is unclear in The Virgin Martyr. Massinger and Dekker run into structural problems in the characterization of Dorothea and Theophilus: they function in a dramatically confused way. As a martyr, Dorothea is characterised as a victim, while performing the structural function of a moral register,¹⁷ and Theophilus' authoritative character makes him appear to function as a moral register of vice when he is in fact in a structural position between vice and virtue (although identified with vice for the bulk of the play). Massinger's characteristic structural pattern is clearly undeveloped in this early play and perhaps suffers from local inconsistencies which might result from a fairly independent dramatic partnership with Dekker.¹⁸

Besides these problems, Theophilus remains a Christian persecutor until Act V, and the whole movement of conversion only takes place at the end. The reconversion of Theophilus' daughters in the middle of the play is subsidiary, and only helps to define the Christian-pagan conflict. Here, Dorothea is able to demonstrate in little the process of Theophilus' conversion which occurs later on, by illustrating the Christian paradox that

15. Paul, pp. 25-27.

16. Paul, p. 144.

17. A point also made by Paul, p. 156.

18. As suggested by Kathleen McLuskie, "The Plays and the Playwrights: Collaboration," in The Revels History, p. 175. The general view is that the play

Your victory had beene eternall losse,
 And this your losse immortall gaine
 (III.i.202-03).

Massinger also makes the most of the opportunity for a spectacular and surprising motif of reversal to lift the play which sags a little in the middle.¹⁹

In the same way, religious debate throughout the play defines the two camps. Images of Heaven, for example, prepare for the visual proof of Dorothea's arguments in Act V. But the two versions are in curiously similar though antipathetic terms. Compare Theophilus' belief: that Dorothea will

goe
 Where all Antipathies to comfort dwell,
 Furies behind, about thee, and before thee,
 And to adde to affliction the remembrance
 Of the Elizian ioyes thou might'st haue
 tasted,
 Hadst thou not turnd Apostata to those
 gods
 That so reward their seruants, let despayre
 Preuent the hangmans sword, and on this
 scaffold
 Make thy first entrance into hell
 (IV.iii.58-66);

with her claim: that

The power I serue
 Laughs at your happy Arabie, or the
 Elizian shades, for he hath made his
 bowers
 Better indeed then you can fancy yours
 (IV.iii.90-93).

is a collaboration rather than a later revision by Massinger. If it is a revision it is done in collaboration.

19. Mullany suggests that this is a tragicomic device, p. 92.

and that

I am a Christian, and the powers you worship
But dreams of fooles and madmen (V.ii.148-49).

The Christian view is, of course, the stronger, but it is not simply superimposed. Barbara Paul suggests that

The validity of two opposing religious views is never really debated in The Virgin Martyr; the plot premise depends on the audience's acceptance of the Christian view as the valid one,²⁰

and Angelo's automatic powers over Harpax, for example, are given no real justification. But the identification of the Christian with the individual as passive victims against a range of tormentors which include the grotesque and bestial Hircius and Spungius develops the Christian view sympathetically. The apparent absence of a religious issue is the product of the emblematic structure. We are not subjected to demonstrations of logic or characterization but to a fairly simple and allegorical movement from one camp to the other.

The tendency to read the play as a morality in terms of this structure returns us to the question of tragedy. The problem, in general terms, is that the play is affirmative while Massinger's tragic vision, as we saw in Chapter IV, is not. What is characteristic of his tragic vision in this play is evident in the mixed results of the catastrophe.

20. Paul, p. 147.

The power of the state is subverted by Theophilus' final demonstration of his Christian individualism, but the conflict continues in Dioclesian's reaffirmation of its power:

The slaue that makes him [Theophilus] giue the
 lowdest shrike
 Shall haue ten thousand Drachmes, wretch ile
 force thee
 To curse the power thou worship'st (V.ii.203-05).

The persistence of this tension is especially interesting in terms of tragedy because Theophilus is made to realise the horror of the Christian paradox -

Your victory had beene eternall losse,
 And this your losse immortall gaine
 (III.i.202-03) -

as well as the hope. Whatever the inconsistencies in the function of Angelo and Harpax as good and evil angels earlier in the play, they cohere in Theophilus' psychomachia at the end.

The tragedy in religious terms is potential rather than realised, and the emblematic brilliance of Christian virtue outshines the potential tragic suffering that Theophilus faces. But the power of the state and the place of the individual remain in tension. The generally affirmative result of the religious issue is mitigated by the reservations which persist as a result of this tension, but the religious terms tend to concentrate on the vindication of virtue. Massinger makes very little use of Theophilus' potentially tragic guilt as an agent of

the state in this play. But we find that he does focus attention on this issue in his later Roman plays, benefiting in his analysis by the absence of the overriding signals of Christian morality. The interests of the individual and the state are played out in the later plays against a secular morality, and the absence of the constraints of Christian morality suggests a bleaker and more nihilistic tragic vision.

In both The Roman Actor and Believe As You List the power of the state forces the individual to compromise his integrity. The success of Dorothea in withstanding the state in The Virgin Martyr is questioned in these plays. Paris and Antiochus are both innocent, in the sense that they preserve their individual integrity above and beyond the roles they play, however much they may believe in them. But they face a much wider range of actors who determine these roles than are present in The Virgin Martyr. These other actors compromise the integrity of Paris and Antiochus by demanding their compliance with a Protean series of political identities.

The Roman Actor conceives the attack on integrity in terms of dramatic role-playing; Believe As You List does so in terms of political role-playing. In both cases, individual identity and morality are annihilated. Paris cannot survive in the world created by Domitian; nor can Antiochus in Flaminius' world. Theophilus was "rescued" in The Virgin Martyr because in that play there exist two poles by which to conceive moral action. In the later plays there

are no moral signals. Paris and Antiochus attempt to preserve their moral integrity in a morass of shifting dramatic and political roles. Unlike the Renaissance plays, the Roman plays suggest a world in which order is usually politically but never morally motivated, and in which it is achieved by the power of the state to compromise or destroy the individual. While The Virgin Martyr does not go so far, the presence of benevolent forces, as Barbara Paul argues,

make themselves heard only after the worst possible calamity has occurred ... and they are punitive ... not protective ones.²¹

Stripped of even a token religious benevolence,
The Roman Actor

makes no moral recovery because no recovery is possible; the tragedy's statement is one of the absence of moral judgement.²²

The Roman Actor patterns the collapse of identity on the metaphor of the world as a stage. The histrionic background which is introduced by the opening line - "What doe wee acte to day?" (The Roman Actor, I.i.1) is pervasive.²³ The theatrical motif is significant in its assumption of illusion as reality, not only in regarding a play as real, as Domitia does, but in identifying

21. Paul, pp. 297-98. Her emphasis.

22. Paul, p. 298. Her emphasis.

23. A point made by Arthur Brown, "The Play within a Play: An Elizabethan Dramatic Device," Essays and Studies, 13 (1960), 45.

the person who acts a role with the role itself. The pervasive confusion which this identification generates prevents the protagonists from recognising themselves and supplies instead a distorted image of god-like power, passionate pleasure or personified guilt, the unrealistic self-perception by which Domitian, Domitia and Paris are deluded.

This confusion produces a direction - a tragic direction - because Paris is the most articulate and most aware of the illusion, and because he becomes a victim of the process of distortion which he generates and recognises in the playlets. He is nearly able to control this confusion by differentiating between the illusion and the reality by which Domitia identifies him. She suggests:

Thou must be reallie in some degree
The thing thou dost present
We seriouslie beleue it
(IV.ii.38-40).

And he attempts to correct her apparently naive assumption:

[However] ...
I doe appeare in the Sceane, my part being ended,
And all my borrowed ornaments put off,
I am no more, nor lesse then what I was
Before I enter'd (IV.ii.48-52).

Peter Davison suggests that this perception is applicable to political role-playing and that, in fact, Domitian recognises this in "putting

off" his deity (IV.i.132-33)²⁴ as a kind of role. The issue seems to be more subtle even than this, however, as Domitian deliberately "plays" yet another role as the incensed husband in the final playlet, and Domitia is also aware of the illusion she maintains. Her use of terms like "act", "perform" and "part", for example, is often deliberately ambiguous.²⁵ The argument that Paris must actually be what he represents - a lover - is a pretence she pursues in attempting to seduce him until "in plaine language" (IV.ii.54) she professes her passion. Paris seems to be out of his depth in the face of this Protean exploitation of identities, and is in fact bewildered as he tries to protect himself by adopting a role to answer Domitia and Domitian, "playing" to the script of his king. Paris is destroyed at the end by his inability to adopt roles in the cynical way in which Domitia and Domitian do. The naive idealism that underlies this is spelled out in his defence of acting at the beginning of the play, and in the ironic demonstration of the limitations of his conception of performance in such a sophisticated political theatre as the Roman state.²⁶

Jonathan Goldberg suggests that Paris does cope adequately with the confluence of impersonated identities in the Roman state. Paris makes the

24. Peter H. Davison, "The Theme and Structure of 'The Roman Actor,'" *A.U.M.L.A.*, 19 (1963), 47.

25. Patricia Thomson, "World Stage and Stage in Massinger's Roman Actor," *Neophilologus*, 54 (1970), 418.

26. See Thomson, pp. 421-24.

law court into a theatre (I.iii.49-51) and turns theatricality on its head so that it is real and the judgements of the law courts are not.²⁷ But Paris's moralistic defence of the theatre is naive and unrealistic.²⁸ (It might be as well to point out that it is not, as many critics assume,²⁹ Massinger's own defence.) Its most obvious weakness is that each function defended by Paris is undercut in the playlets.³⁰ He argues that spectators can actually differentiate between illusion and reality, but Philargus, Domitia and Domitian ignore this artistic objectivity in their playlets.³¹ For each of them the emotive effect of the illusion is so strong as to collapse with reality; they can hardly be restrained, and they allow real consequences to the fictional events, so that the climaxes in the three middle acts are the result of the performance in the playlets.³² Massinger takes pains to emphasise the fragility of Paris's assumption. In the case of Philargus,

27. Jonathan Goldberg, James I and the Politics of Literature. Jonson, Shakespeare, Donne, and their Contemporaries (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983), pp. 203-05.

28. As A.P. Hogan points out in "Imagery of Acting in 'The Roman Actor,'" Modern Language Review, 66 (1971), 275.

29. For example, B.T. Spencer, pp. 3-4; A.L. Bennett, "The Moral Tone of Massinger's Dramas," Papers on Language and Literature, 2 (1966), 211; L.G. Salingar, "The Decline of Tragedy", in The Age of Shakespeare, ed. Boris Ford, p. 491.

30. As Marinoff points out, in "The Dramatic Art of Philip Massinger," p. 18.

31. As Hogan notes, "Imagery of Acting," 278.

32. This point is variously made by Paul, p. 232; de Vos, p. 77; and Thomson, p. 413. On the other

He shall be so Anotamiz'd in the Scaene,
 And see himselfe so personated; the
 basenes
 Of a selfe torturing miserable wretch
 Truly describ'd, that I much hope the
 object
 Will worke compunction in him
 (II.i.104-08).

Paris's assumption is no doubt effective in preaching to the converted but Philargus is not objective - and the objective misery of a wretched miser is for him sympathetic because the miser is tricked.³³

Barbara Paul points out a similar case against Paris's defence:

Every claim that Paris makes for the stage is proved to be either correct in a way not at all intended by the actor, or else completely false.³⁴

For instance, philosophers and actors do accomplish the same thing - they all suffer execution; Parthenius is inspired as a patriot, but against Domitian and because Domitian "cured" his father by execution; Iphis's virtue inspires lust in Domitia; and the corrupt Domitian does not feel compunction in his judgement of Paris.³⁵ Patricia

hand, S. Gorley Putt considers the playlets to be wholly inorganic ("The Complacency of Philip Massinger," 110), as does Dunn, pp. 65-66.

33. David Frost argues that "The Cure of Avarice" is a total irrelevance. The School of Shakespeare, p. 101.

34. Paul, p. 238.

35. Paul, pp. 238-40. Thomson argues that Domitian is unwilling to kill Paris, pp. 412-13.

Thomson points out a further contradiction in the success of philosophy to outdo drama - the philosophers do make Domitian feel guilty. And in the case of Philargus

to direct the performance against a specified individual, even where the intention is generous, does go against the grain of Paris's former professions.³⁶

More serious, however, is that Paris bases his assumption of theatrical objectivity on the further assumption that representation is contiguous with morality, not with power. His defence begs political immunity:

If any in this reuerend assemblie [the
Senate],
Nay e'ne your self my Lord, that are the
image
Of absent Caesar, feele something in your
bosome
That puts you in remembrance of things
past,
Or things intended tis not in vs to helpe
it (I.iii.136-40).

The weakness of this assumption is that Domitian's power is theatrical and spectacular as well.³⁷ He is a player who plays a king. Peter Davison argues

The divinity is in the office, not the man,
just as the poetry is in the play, not the
player ³⁸

but illusion and reality are not so discrete. As long as Domitian's rhetoric and the spectacular

36. Thomson, pp. 423-24.

37. Thomson, p. 416.

38. Davison, pp. 50-51.

demonstration of his godhead remain unchallenged, his power is real. And Domitian maintains it by scripting the action that surrounds him. A.P. Hogan has noticed an allusion to the Annunciation when Parthenius acts a miniature drama as the messenger of Domitian, asking for the hand of Domitia for his god.³⁹ Domitian similarly "scripts" Lamia's renunciation of his wife later.⁴⁰ This power is shaken only when the Stoics, Rusticus and Sura,⁴¹ refuse to perform their allotted parts:

It is vnkindly done to mocke his furie
Whom the world stiles omnipotent.

I am tortur'd
In their want of feeling torments
(III.ii.87-89).

Lamia causes a similar fear. Their refusal to accept Domitian's theatrical power threatens his control of reality.⁴² It is only by a simple extension that the rebellion of Parthenius, Domitia, Julia, Caenis, Domitilla, Stephanos, Sijeius and Entellus destroys it, and they do so by a characteristically theatrical strategy. By deluding Domitian they trap him. The collapse of illusion and reality this time destroys his power. They reduce him, by Act V, to "a weeke, feeble man" (V.i.48), stripped of his histrionic power.⁴³ But before this happens Massinger allows Paris and all he stands for to be destroyed.

39. Hogan, "Imagery of Acting," 275.

40. Hogan, "Imagery of Acting," 276.

41. Spencer identifies their passive courage as Stoic, p. 33.

42. Hogan, "Imagery of Acting," 276; Thomson, p. 414.

43. Thomson, p. 417.

Paris falls because he accepts and acts within the terms of Domitian's power. He finally succumbs to Domitian's theatre and acknowledges, by allowing Domitian to kill him, that he is the role he plays; that is, he makes himself in Domitian's image, rejecting his integrity as an individual for the role that Domitian demands.⁴⁴

The attack on the individual is extreme because Paris is subjected to a double drama of seduction, first by Domitia, then in "The False Servant". Domitia's seduction, itself motivated by a theatrical passion stemming from the earlier playlets, subverts Paris's integrity. She forces him to re-assume the "borrowed ornaments" (IV.ii.50) of the lover, and play the part of Paris to her Helen (IV.ii.103-04). Domitian reinforces the theatrical implications by scripting the scene from above: "I am Menelaus" (IV.ii.105); "Amphitrio / Stands by, and drawes the curtaines" (IV.ii.112-13); and "the Theater of the Gods / Are sad spectators." (IV.ii.115-16). The scene is degrading, Paris is left grovelling on the ground,⁴⁵ but his part in "The False Servant" is more so as he capitulates to the ignoble role that Domitian casts him in.

44. Thomson, p. 420.

45. Thomson, however, finds it to be less shocking, and the issue of justice less terrible than in the earlier playlets. She points out that Domitian is unwilling to kill Paris (IV.ii.165-68, 285-86), but seems to ignore the fact that Paris is essentially innocent of the crime which Domitian (and Domitia) make him play. See Thomson, pp. 412-13, 424.

"The False Servant" expresses Domitian's complete power. Unlike the first two playlets where the collapse of illusion with reality is a subjective and emotional confusion,⁴⁶ here it is deliberate. Paris is aware of his role and aware that Domitian is acting "in earnest" (IV.ii.283); he is aware that the play points to his guilt, though it may just as well point at Domitia's or Domitian's, but he "cannot helpe it" (I.iii.114). Domitian's power is not so much the impunity with which he may kill Paris, but his ability to subvert Paris's integrity, to make him admit his guilt, and most of all to make him consummate his guilt in the seedy re-enactment of the playlet.

There is, I think, no justification for the view that Paris is triumphant in The Roman Actor. Barbara Paul argues that the play charts a re-alignment of the minor figures with Paris as a titular figure of opposition⁴⁷ but Lamia, Rusticus and Sura, Julia, Caenis and Domitilla have nothing to do with Paris and they identify their revenge with Domitia.⁴⁸ That "Paris" is deceived and falls is, perhaps, significant, for the Menelaus and Helen of the play subvert and destroy innocence. Massinger may be

46. This is the usual formula for the play within a play, as in the playlet in The Mayor of Queenborough, for example, where the actors gull their simple audience by making them believe that while they act as thieves they are not really thieves. See Dieter Mehl, "Forms and Functions of the Play within a Play," Renaissance Drama, 8 (1965), 41-61.

47. Paul, Ch. 6.

48. Fredson Bowers distinguishes the revenge plot as secondary, a background to the principal action. Bowers, Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy, pp. 206. 213.

calling on the archetypal suggestion of a golden age and its destruction, rather than vindication, with the fall of Troy.

Even without this metaphor, the play is surely tragic. The subversion of Paris's integrity questions the kind of affirmation we found in The Virgin Martyr. We might even suspect that a play on Christianity in the Protean world of The Roman Actor would have subverted Dorothea. It would certainly hoodwink Theophilus. But the play is not nihilistic. The disillusionment we experience in witnessing "The False Servant" works both ways. We are shown that the moral roles which Paris defends at the beginning are untenable, but the concession to the terms of Domitian also weakens his position. Domitian's power as illusion and the means to subvert it are made clear. Domitian is deluded at last by Parthenius' impersonated integrity, but with his death and the sentence on Domitia the Roman actors are destroyed and we are left with the clear and simple order that is organised by nameless tribunes. The violence of the conflict, the attack on principles of justice (in a much more sustained metaphorical way), and the return to a skeletal order recall Massinger's Renaissance plays. The introduction of a supernatural element which allows Domitian to deify his sins - "the offended gods ... now sit iudges on me" (V.i.281-82) - also recalls the revision of order in The Unnatural Combat. But the supernatural provides even less moral security here than it does in the earlier play.⁴⁹ The moral order

49. Thomson sees the success of the assassination as a vindication of the power of the gods, p. 417. Massinger only touches on the problem of revenge as a moral instrument here.

represented by the tribunes who punish the assassins (rather than rewarding the agents of the gods) is purely secular. The tendency to question that order seems to have become more intense: why should Paris's morality be so inadequate; are the tribunes likely to be any better? This tendency reaches its most acute form in Massinger's annihilation of moral claims in Believe As You List.

Most critics agree that Believe As You List is one of Massinger's best plays,⁵⁰ and share remarkably similar views on its open-endedness.⁵¹ Even so, much of the attention to the play has been of a bibliographical nature, due of course to the remarkable quality of the manuscript,⁵² but the play seems to have suffered until recently in the scant attention

50. A.L. Bennett calls it Massinger's Lear, p. 214; Marinoff suggests that it is "probably his finest tragedy", p. 26; and A.P. Hogan that it is his most ambitious and original tragedy, "Massinger as a Tragedian: Believe As You List," Texas Studies in Literature and Language, 13 (1971-72), 407. A.H. Cruickshank, on the other hand, called it a "fiasco", Philip Massinger, p. 140.

51. The general consensus is that the impasse is effective, but Roma Gill sees it as unsatisfactory, and argues that it prevents the play from becoming properly tragic. See Roma Gill, "'Necessitie of State': Massinger's Believe As You List," English Studies, 46 (1965), 416.

52. See David Bradley's interesting study, "The Ignorant Elizabethan Author and Massinger's Believe As You List," Sydney Studies in English, 2 (1976-77), 98-125. The introductions in the Malone edition (Believe As You List, ed. C.J. Sisson, Malone Society Reprints [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1927]), and the Oxford Massinger, III, 298-301, discuss manuscript and sources. David Bradley repeats much of this in "A Major Source of Massinger's Believe As You List (1631)," Notes and Queries, NS 227 (1982), 20-22, as does Gill, pp. 407-08.

paid to its political issues, being usually regarded as a fairly simple political allegory.⁵³ While this view has been sufficiently discredited⁵⁴ Believe As You List still provides a rich mine for bibliographic diggers who tend to distort the fine balance between political claims that Massinger produces by identifying sympathetic (or antipathetic⁵⁵) causes outside its Roman context. On an allegorical reading of the play as propaganda the political vindication of Antiochus (or the Portuguese Sebastian, or the German Frederick) should be necessary, yet Massinger never allows him to prevail, and produces a morally unsatisfactory conclusion. He achieves this by presenting, as A.P. Hogan puts it,

representatives of moral order and moral anarchy [who] are astonishingly well matched.⁵⁶

53. After S.R. Gardiner, "The Political Element in Massinger," The Contemporary Review, 28 (1876), 495-507 and T.A. Dunn, pp. 172-76.

54. Principally by Allen Gross, "Contemporary Politics in Massinger," Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900, 6 (1966), 279-90.

55. Henri Jacob Makkink, for instance, seems to place Antiochus in a Renaissance political milieu when he argues that Antiochus is a weak monarch who does not dare fight. H.J. Makkink, Philip Massinger and John Fletcher. A Comparison (Rotterdam: Nijh and Van Ditmars Uitgevers - Mij, 1928), p. 63. This ignores, most obviously, Antiochus' specifically Stoic endurance and seems to completely misinterpret his political misfortunes.

56. Hogan, "Massinger as a Tragedian," 407.

Furthermore, he allows a set of interchangeable terms where political order opposes political anarchy, on the basis of a sympathetic reading of Machiavellian political practice.

Antiochus' claim to kingship is challenged by the realignment which Flaminius forces on the political pragmatists of the play. Antiochus faces a series of reversals after initially encouraging receptions. The process recalls The Roman Actor except that there Paris was compromised by the Protean roles which Domitian and his Roman actors assumed, while here Antiochus has his political pretensions stripped away as his allies shed their friendship for more basic motives of political survival. But like The Roman Actor, virtue must be abandoned, and betray itself, in order to survive.⁵⁷

The pattern might best be seen by using Barbara Paul's model, as outlined earlier,⁵⁸ even though her application of the model to Believe As You List is, I think, incorrect. Paul argues that Antiochus attempts to take Carthage (which she identifies as the feminine symbol in the absence of a major female character) from Flaminius, reversing the interpretation which we might expect where the secondary figure (Flaminius) should win out over the primary figure (Antiochus).⁵⁹ It seems fairly obvious that Flaminius has already "stolen" Carthage and that Massinger concentrates on the conflict which usually occupies the last act for a whole five acts. By failing to recognise this, Paul is led to argue:

57. Hogan, "Massinger as a Tragedian," 415.

58. Ch. V, pp. 149-50, note 15.

59. Paul, p. 27.

The incidents cannot reveal the gradual alienation of support from the central figure through the machinations of the secondary figure,⁶⁰

(because she wrongly identifies the secondary figure as Antiochus who fails to defeat Flaminius) but this is precisely what happens - the play does chart the gradual alienation of support from Antiochus.

Massinger places this movement between two kinds of government, the personal and the political,⁶¹ and between two types of ruler. One, the king, whose

glorious attribute of maiestie
that troublesome, though most triumphant robe
[Was] designde mee in my birth
(Believe As You List, I.i.11-13).

The other, the politician, who

by my birth
... am bounde to serue thee Rome, and what I
doe
necessitie of state compells mee to
(II.i.124-26).

Massinger charts the degradation of Antiochus by allowing greater power to the "Machiavellian creed"⁶² of Flaminius, but he maintains a fine balance between the two kinds of political claim by collapsing religious and political terms to describe both. While the statement

60. Paul, p. 28.

61. Philip Edwards makes this point in "The Royal Pretenders in Massinger and Ford," Essays and Studies, 27 (1974), 28. See also Henry W. Wells, Elizabethan and Jacobean Playwrights, pp. 106-07.

62. Gill, p. 411.

[Rome's] relligious authoritie
 the propagation of the comon welth
 to whose increase they are sworne
 (I.i.82-84),

lacks punctuation, it would distort the meaning to isolate the political motive from "relligious authoritie", especially when it involves an oath. It is also significant that Antiochus makes the point: it is not only Flaminius who sees the well being of the Roman state in religious terms (II.i.122-24). Similarly, the "policy" which we associate with Flaminius is also recognised by Antiochus' Stoic mentor at the beginning:

the Asian princes ...
 are equallie ingag'd with you, and must
 though not in loue to iustice for their
 safetie
 in policie assist, garde, and protect you
 (I.i.94-101).

In the political and the religious context the two camps are remarkably equal.

Flaminius is powerful, however, because his Machiavellian principles are more flexible. He is political in two ways in which Antiochus is not. Firstly, he is able to reject thoughts and emotions which discredit the propagation of the commonwealth. His observation

that I began
 to feele an inclination to beleeeue
 what I must haue no faith in (II.i.122-24)

is detached and almost neutral, but as he continues bound to serve Rome and compelled by necessity of

state (quoted above, II.i.124-26) we recognise a dissociation quite unlike Antiochus' form of integrity, in which Flaminius cannot believe what he likes. He expresses a similar dissociation of the personal from his political identity in a later, more rhetorical performance:

in civill courtesie
 as I am Titus flaminivs I may thancke you.
 but sittinge heere as Romes embassador
 in w^{ch} you are honor'd, to instruct you in
 Her will, w^{ch} you are bounde to serue not
 argue
 I must not borrow that were poore, but
 take
 as a tribute due to her, that's iustlye
 stilde
 the mistrisse of this earthlye globe the
 boldnesse
 to reprehende your slow progression in
 doeinge her greatnesse right (II.ii.87-96).

Flaminius attempts to impose this dissociation and obedience to the state upon his political opposition. His method is to convert opposition to his point of view. The Carthaginian senators, for example, believe Antiochus' claim but are restrained by policy:

wee wishe wee coulde
 receaue you as a kinge, since your relation
 hath wrought soe much vpon vs that wee doe
 incline to that beleefe. but since wee
 cannot
 as such protecteyou but with certaine danger
 vntill you are by other potent nations
 proclaime for such. our fittinge caution
 cannot bee censur'd though wee doe intreate
 you woulde elsewhere seeke iustice
 (II.ii.358-64).

Prusias is similarly subjected to his own "necessitie of state" (III.iii.194):

for my
 securitie, ther beeinge noe meanes left
 els,
 against my will I must deliver you
 (III.iii.202-04).

Finally, Marcellus reaffirms the dissociation even though he also condemns Flaminius:

pray you thincke s^r
 a Roman, not your constant freinde that
 tells you
 you are confinde vnto the Gyarae
 with a stronge garde vpon you
 (V.ii.233-36).

This dissociation of personal and political identity also motivates Flaminius' attempts to efface Antiochus' moral or spiritual identity once the political struggle is won:

his business is to uncreate him, to get him
 to unsay himself and declare himself counter-
 feit 63

and it is disconcerting that although he fails to destroy Antiochus in this way and although he is himself defeated Antiochus is still not vindicated. The terms of Cornelia's defence of personal integrity are extreme:

this is
 the kinge Antiochus as sure as I am
 the daughter of my mother
 .
 they are traytors
 traytors to innocence and oppresd iustice
 that dare affirme the contrarie (V.ii.168-72),

63. Edwards, p. 29. See also Hogan, "Massinger as a Tragedian," 412.

yet Marcellus easily weathers them, affirming that he is still Antiochus' friend. The dissociation of his personal from his political identity seems to be more thorough and more countermanding than even Flaminius'. And we cannot condemn Marcellus' injustice as we can the injustices of Flaminius and his protégés.⁶⁴

Flaminius' second form of dissociation is more conscious and theatrical. He exploits "properties" and "roles" as dramatic devices to persuade his opposition, for example:

in this various play
of state, and policie, theres noe propertie
but may be vsefull (II.i.37-39);

and

I am on the stage
and yf now in the scaene [imposd] vpon mee
soe full of change, nay a meere labirynth
of politic windinges I shoue not my selfe
a Protean actor varijnge everie shape
with the occasion, it will hardlye poyze
the expectation (III.i.12-18).

This conscious manipulation and the implications of seduction in the practice of delusion are typical

64. Spencer argues that Marcellus is more like Prusias, being forced to succumb to political expediency. Spencer, p. 46. G. Wilson Knight distinguishes him from Flaminius on the basis of his enlightened fine feelings, The Golden Labyrinth: A Study of British Drama (New York: Norton, 1962), p. 119.

of the dramatic type of the devil⁶⁵ (as well as of Iago and Francisco) and Flaminius is, in fact, repeatedly referred to as a "divell" or "fiende" (I.ii.8; II.ii.180; II.ii.271; III.ii.75; III.ii.111-12; V.ii.211).⁶⁶ He seems to degenerate, as Roma Gill points out, into a stage villain,⁶⁷ but by allowing him to do so Massinger does not take "the easy way out" as Gill suggests.⁶⁸ The indictment of Flaminius relieves our sympathies for Antiochus but it does not disparage Machiavellian principles and Massinger does not sidestep the problems it involves because, as we have seen, he allows Marcellus to express by his detachment the most thoroughgoing Machiavellian principles in the play. Flaminius fails as a Machiavel precisely because he becomes diabolical.

The political debate remains in balance at the end of the play - innocence and justice challenge necessity of state and policy, but the tension is not resolved: "the manner how [Antiochus] shall dye is vncertaine" (V.ii.238). Massinger recasts the debate in moral terms, and with Flaminius in a diabolical rather than a Machiavellian role, to approach the problem from the other side. In the

65. See Leah Scragg, "Iago - Vice or Devil?" Shakespeare Survey, 21 (1968), 53-65, for a discussion of this issue.

66. A.P. Hogan, "Massinger as a Tragedian," notes most of these, 415.

67. Gill, p. 415.

68. Gill, p. 415.

moral debate Antiochus' integrity is the more powerful but again Massinger leaves the conflict unresolved.

The attempt to "uncreate" Antiochus is not political but spiritual, and cast in the form of the traditional temptations of the morality play.⁶⁹ The scene recalls Shakespeare's Richard II⁷⁰ and suggests the same pathetic attempt to cling to kingship. The distinction between the personal and political identity of the king is made apparent in Richard II, he becomes "unkinged Richard" (Richard II, IV.i.219). Flaminius' attempts to unking Antiochus are similar, but he tries to subvert Antiochus' identity altogether and not just as a king. This involves, firstly, the perdition of his soul (Believe As You List, IV.ii.59) and is conceived in the images of the morality play. Antiochus' "better angell" (IV.ii.55) protects him from the temptation to suicide, and the Courtezan tempts him to "a paradise of delight" as his "better Genivs" (IV.ii.184-86). Secondly, it involves his degradation as a slave. The parallel between the degradation of Antiochus and the humiliation of Christ is obvious,⁷¹ and it allows Massinger to borrow from the Christian paradox of the hero victorious in defeat, but the secular context precludes a confident moral outcome. Antiochus is, on these terms, not subverted but neither is

69. Hogan, "Massinger as a Tragedian," 413. Marinoff sees Antiochus as an embodiment of Everyman, but only in Act V, p. 36.

70. The resemblance has not, as far as I am aware, been noticed before.

71. Also noted by Hogan, "Massinger as a Tragedian," 416.

Flaminius foiled. To all intents and purposes
Antiochus is degraded:

the lockes of this once royall head are
shau'd of,
my glorious robes changd to this slavische
habit
this hand that graspd a scepter manacle
(IV.iv.51-53),

yet "still there does appeare / a kinde of maiestie
in hym" (IV.iv.33-34). On the other side, while
Antiochus seems to vindicate his spiritual majesty
Berecinthus (who is, after all, the priest and
spokesman for Antiochus) confirms the atheistic
Roman weltanschauung:

|thow|art a foole
to thincke there are gods, or goddesses,
they are thinges wee make our selves
(IV.iii.36-40).

This undercutting of either side in the moral
conflict suspends the issue as long as the terms
of the Christian paradox and atheism are exclus-
ive.

The extreme suspension of poetic justice in
Believe As You List is, I think, painful.⁷² The
process by which Antiochus is exhausted by a series
of antagonists resembles The Unnatural Combat,
except that the protagonist of that play was more
or less guilty, while Antiochus is innocent.

72. Or "tediously pessimistic" according to Dunn,
p. 119.

Massinger found a lightning bolt to finish Maelfort off, but he comes up with no act of God to vindicate Antiochus here. And Believe As You List is so shocking as a tragedy precisely because there is no poetic justice. Antiochus claims that "a greater power does rayse, or pull downe kinges" (V.ii.243), but on the terms of the play it is a politically rather than morally ordered power.

Massinger's final tragedy is an extreme expression of his moral uncertainty, his study of the suffering of man in a morally inscrutable universe. He expresses, that is, that "negative capability" usually reserved for Shakespeare and denied to Massinger by critics like Spencer and Dunn.⁷³ Dunn argued that

Massinger was not interested in or capable of rendering the infinite varieties and unexpectedness of life. He had none of what Keats called 'Negative Capability, that is when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason.' He was a born moralist ... not capable of truly cathartic tragedy.⁷⁴

This misreading of Massinger has had too long an influence. Clearly, the tragic free-play of conflicting forces, the tendency to question the basis of moral order, even the ambiguity of those tragicomedies that undercut romance morality, are not suggestive of the born moralist at all but of the very questioning of morality and the expression of uncertainty.

73. Dunn, pp. 131, 149; Spencer, p. 6.

74. Dunn, p. 131 (quoting from The Letters of John Keats, ed. Colvin, London, 1925, p. 48) and p. 144.

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